

Instagram in TESOL An Educational Tool or an Excuse for Socializing

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: August 2026 Keywords: Instagram, Social Media, Education, Benefits, Classroom	There are many different opinions on social media inside and outside the classroom. The purpose of this thesis to examine whether students perceive that they are benefitting from peer interaction/socialization or whether they perceive their experience as formal learning. There is a lot of research suggesting practical and educational uses for social media in education, however, despite this it is important to analyze it to see how students perceive it. How are the applications and their use influencing student perceptions? Are the students actually engaged in formal learning? Or do they just perceive using social media as an opportunity to socialize with their classmates?

1. Introduction

Reactions to using Social Media Platforms for language education are largely positive and it certainly appears to be popular with students (see literature review) However, in the research of this area, the effectiveness or improvements seem to be attributed to the social aspects of these platforms above any formal learning. Are the benefits a side-effect of increased peer socialization or is there actual formal learning?

It is important to look at this area so that educators may develop a structured approach to using these platforms. Some teachers may be convinced by positive research and move a significant amount of learning over to Instagram. However, they may lose control of the curriculum if the students are not monitored or organized correctly. So, it is important to analyze students' perception of the learning tool / platform. Is it from formal online learning through social media or just simple peer socialization? This is important, as introducing a proportional amount of social media interactions may be useful. Depending introducing or depending on it completely may prove chaotic and lead to complications for the school and students. The research will set out to prove one of two hypotheses:

- The students perceive that they are benefitting from peer interaction and their grades are improving because of increased socialization.
- Or

- The students are benefitting from formal learning on social media platforms.

It is important to determine whether social media networks provide increased socialization or whether the students are engaged in formal learning on the networks. This will help educators determine the proportion of time utilized on these platforms. If the students are benefitting from socialization and peer interaction alone, it may be wise to back up this learning context with formal learning offline too. However, if the students are benefitting from formal learning online then it has consequences for learning and for teaching methods. It could be adapted more formally into curriculums.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Instagram

There are lots of different uses for Instagram in education (Gonzaga 2020, Mansor 2017, Wulandari 2019). Gonzaga (2020) indicates that Instagram is useful in encouraging students to play with language, which is useful in EFL lessons. She points out that weight is placed on grammar or vocabulary. However, she attributes this to sharing and engagement with the platform. (Gonzaga 2020). Mansor (2017) hails Instagram as a great tool for students to interact with. Mansor describes it as providing motivation for the students. As they are willing to express themselves on such global platforms. She displays this by the increase in comments and use by students after projects were posted to Instagram, the comments grew daily. The students also became braver or took more risks with English and the students were more relaxed and spontaneous after using the platform. (Mansor 2017). Erarslan (2019) presents Instagram as part of everyday life and therefore is a candidate for a tool to be utilised for educational purposes. It is noted that increased utility has put pressure in the authors learning environment to use Instagram. Instagram's advantages are praised as allowing for autonomous and social learning, as well as the benefits of teamwork and knowledge sharing. It gives Face to face learning support and creates a social presence for language learning and practicing communicative skills. Also, it reduced stress amongst shy students. (Erarslan 2019) Then we have Hape (2018) this author's research states that Instagram had a positive effect on speaking. Their participant's scores were higher after using Instagram, especially in vocabulary. Once again it is mentioned that Instagram is useful for shy students. (Hape 2018). So far, we have two pieces of research praising academic improvements due to social and communication benefits, especially to 'shy' students. Khalitova (2016) also says that Students are motivated by the interface and constant accessibility of Instagram (Khalitova 2016)

Then we have Rinda et al (2018) this piece of research presents Pros and Cons. The Pros are that students writing on Instagram helped with grammar, spelling and vocabulary. Also, Rinda et al notes that idea generation and self-correction improved. On a social level it nurtured social interaction amongst the students. However, when it comes to Cons, the participants found negative comments

and over correction frustrating. It forced them to check (possibly over check) to avoid negativity. Also, the Ads distracted students. A note about this specific research is that the students had to use their personal internet data to access the internet. One of the recommendations was the need to maximize the teacher's role. This research seems to have concerns mostly associated with interaction and social aspects of the network. (Rinda et al. 2018). Pujiati et al (2019) also mentions the issue of the divide between personal and educational use (Pujiati et al 2019). Aloraini (2018) expresses concerns about output quality by the students' Instagram followers and again monitoring by teachers (Aloraini 2018). Handayani (2019) suggests many different learning activities, they can Increase skills and help shy learners. The author theorises that shy learners may be more comfortable on Instagram than in the classroom. The author concludes that Instagram improves writing skills and interpersonal skills (Handayani 2019)

With just one network covered so far, it is clear that social network learning is it all about nurturing teamwork and communication between the students. It appears to be about improved interaction. However, there are issues such as Ads and Over checking. Erarslan (2019) suggests it makes students confident. Rinda (2018) praises benefits for shy students but notes over-checking, could this suggest low confidence? Or dependence on the teacher? Hape (2018) talks about it helping shy students. Handayani (2019) claims that speaking on camera helps students who may be shy in class. There is a clear pattern of increased communication benefitting the students.

2.2 Anti Social Media and the Future

While there is a lot of research suggesting positive uses for social media, there is also a lot of material that is completely against the use of Social Media in Education. Dhawan (2021) Talks digital body language and negative perceptions users online have of each other based on their online activity. Also there is Lanier J (2018) who claims that social media is making expression meaningless, as everything is defined within the context of the network being used.

3. Methodology

The method will be an analysis of the research from the literature review. The selected research papers were chosen due to their discussion of the use of social media platforms in education. Their findings will be analyzed for their methods and conclusions on whether the students perceived their use as formal learning or just an opportunity for peer-interaction / socialization. On a preliminary examination of the research, when compiling the literature review, it seems that it will lead to the following conclusions. The students benefitted from the use of social media in their learning, however this was strictly due to peer-to-peer interaction. The previous research doesn't really examine whether the students could have improved with the same amount of interaction in a classroom scenario. There is some mention of teacher-student interaction on the platforms, however, the majority of the research cites peer interaction as the most prominent. Also, there is no evidence of formal learning. Some of the research had surveys and questionnaires for the students and their perception was of improvement due to peer communication, not formal learning. So from this point in the research, it appears that my hypothesis may be proven.

4. Findings

4.1 Instagram Application Description and Analysis

To fully appreciate the research on Instagram, it is important to look through some of the features, to gain a better understanding of how it works. Instagram is a very visual application. If you look at an Instagram profile you will see just photos and then if you examine it further, you may see comments attached. We will begin with the photo features. Posting photos. To post a photo you either select one from your phone or take one using the app, you can then add filters, captions emojis and locations. You can post 10 photos at a time. You can also 'tag' your friends in a photo. It appears on your profile feed and everyone can comment or 'like' it. Also, you can edit the details at will. (Instagram Help - Posting and Adding Locations 2020) Anyone on Instagram can see your photos, profile comments etc. If you add a hashtag (#hashtag) then people searching that topic can see your photos. For privacy you can set photos to private and only your followers can see. Instagram gives the option of removing followers, blocking everyone you don't want to see your photos. (Instagram Help - Who can see my teen's photos? 2020) Then we come to comments, who can see the student's comments? Well, anyone apparently, unless you go through the rigorous privacy steps for setting your profile to private or engage in blocking etc. While privacy is a good idea, it only works if everyone involved in the class has engaged the same level of privacy and security on their accounts. However, now is where it gets complex, if a student mentions a celebrity or someone who has a public account, then the mentioned person gets notified. When the student likes a comment or comments on a public photo or video, that 'like' or 'comment' is public. Then we have Instagram on Google. If you log-in to your Instagram on a Google website, then all of your photos etc can appear in Google search. This is due to Google and Instagram being linked with an API (Application Programming Interface). Basically, an API allows Instagram to be viewed on Google. This can be corrected by going into setting and clicking on 'Revoke access to third-party websites' However, according to (Instagram Help - Controlling your visibility 2020) this can take some time.

Instagram Stories. This is where you can post a short summary or story. If your profile is private, it appears everywhere, in your profile, at the top of your feed, In a feed next to the post you share and Direct inbox. If your profile is public, it will also appear in Search & Explore and Shared Stories. It will disappear after 24 hours. You can also select specific people to hide your story from. (Instagram Help - Stories 2020)

Posting videos. There are many ways of posting videos on Instagram, each with their own quirks and settings. Reels are like videos. They are 30 seconds long. If you have a public account anyone can see them. But, if you have a private account only your followers can see them. Reels can be seen by all your other followers on your profile. Reels posted to your profile will stay there until you delete them. Reels sent by Instagram direct will disappear after 24 hours. (Instagram Help: Reels (2020) Then there is Instagram Live. This is where you can broadcast live on your Instagram profile. People can comment on your broadcast and you can even pin comments to highlight them. You can also have three different profiles speaking on the same broadcast. However, after the broadcast, if you save it, the comments, likes etc. will disappear. (Instagram Help - Live 2020) IGTV (InstaGramTeleVision). This works like

a regular video sharing feature. You can upload videos and the same private and public sharing and viewing rules apply. If you are uploading from a phone, the video can only be 15 minutes and if you are uploading from a PC then the video can be 60 minutes. (Instagram Help - IGTV 2020)

Then there is the Instagram messaging feature, Instagram Direct. You can send photos, videos and links. The same methods apply to messages as posting. You can also have a group conversation. The conversation is limited to a maximum of 32 people. There is however the option of sending disappearing messages, photos or videos through Instagram Direct. These are messages that literally disappear once they have been viewed by the recipient. Also, you can unsend messages. Assuming that the recipient hasn't read the message already. You can unsend it. (Instagram Help - Direct Messaging 2020)

After examining the key features of Instagram, we can now examine the research from a more informed perspective. Gonzaga (2020) Outlines different activities for using Instagram as an EFL teaching tool. However, her claims are based on information exchange and collaboration. She says Instagram's best feature for teaching is the ability of students to share their production visually in media such as images or video clips, also she praises the use of the comments section. She wants students to use Instagram during class time and beyond class time. However, is there any formal learning here? And what are the outcomes? (Gonzaga 2020). Then Mansor (2017) hails Instagram as a great tool for students to interact with. Mansor describes it as providing motivation for the students. As they are willing to express themselves on such global platforms. Her research shows an increase in comments and use by students after projects were posted to Instagram. Also, the interactions with the projects grew daily. The students also became braver or took more risks with English and the students were more relaxed and spontaneous after using the platform. (Mansor 2017) This shows more socialisation amongst the students, however there isn't any mention of the quality or content of the comments or whether the students were talking about the project itself. (Mansor 2017) Wulandari (2019) thoroughly researches the impact of Instagram vlog (video blog) utility on 'basic level' students speaking performance. The research states that Instagram contributed to the learners speaking ability, this was based on a pre and post assessment analysis. There was also a questionnaire and the students believed it helped their fluency. Due to the short duration of the Instagram vlog, the students had to express their ideas very 'effectively', or efficiently. Wulandari hails this brevity as beneficial. We should note that (at the time of the research) Wulandari states that the time limit for a video was one minute and the students had to make a series of videos to be viewed in succession to get their point across. Limiting the amount of time students could speak might lead to them using more basic vocabulary, functions and ideas just to fit the time frame of the vlog. Also, if the students were using basic language structures to fit a timed video they may have made less errors than in an open class or non-timed scenario. Could the results have been successful by the omission of errors by the students? Wulandari also notes that there was no control group for the research, so, we don't have an offline class to compare it to. Would the offline class have performed better? (Wulandari 2019)

Erarslan (2019) presents Instagram as part of everyday life and therefore is a candidate for a tool to be utilized for educational purposes. It is noted that increased utility has put pressure in the authors learning environment to use Instagram. Instagram's advantages are praised as allowing for autonomous and social learning, as well as the benefits of teamwork and knowledge sharing. It gives Face to face learning support and creates a social presence for language learning and practicing communicative skills. Also, it reduced stress amongst shy students. However, Erarslan describes the benefits in terms of sharing information and hails Instagram as a platform for education. His research talks about student's attitudes and that student's stated that it was student generated content that interested them. Erarslan says this aided learning in the lives of Learners. The students in question focused on peer-relations collaboration and sharing. They perceived the use of Instagram as it allowed them to interact with their own material and comments, not so much formal learning or teacher-student interaction. Post-test performance was shown to be better and Erarslan describes this improvement as being due to more time spent on Instagram. This leads us to the question, if more time spent interacting improved student's performance, could the same improvements have been obtained with the same amount of practice in a classroom? (Erarslan 2019) Hape (2018) states that Instagram had a positive effect on speaking. Their participant's scores were higher after using Instagram, especially in vocabulary. Hape credits Instagram with improving speaking ability, however this is due to more chances of communication among students. They learn outside the class environment and there is little mention of teacher-student interaction on the platform. The students are shown to have an improved grammar accuracy because they could review their work on Instagram. Also, shy students had the ability to speak up, which is fine for comments. Would shy students be more shy when being recorded on video for the internet? Hape also claims an improvement in vocabulary due to reading and memorization. The only problem with memorization is that they may have difficulty using the vocabulary in a different context or with a different language function. Also, Hape claims that students can learn vocabulary everywhere with Instagram, this assumes an unlimited amount of data and wi-fi signal for every student. Hape concludes with a call to action for teachers to improve the use of Instagram for 'formal school'. This statement implies that the use of Instagram is due to increased use and socialization by the learners. Also, the study doesn't mention student-teacher interaction much, so the students are just benefitting from increased socialization online and peer-interaction and the improvement can be attributed to the latter alone. (Hape 2018) Khalitova (2016) focuses on advanced students. The research involved students watching a 20 second authentic speaking video three times a week for four months, the students completed a comprehension in their own time. The teacher assessed the students during a regular lesson. So, it appears there was no formal learning online, just the use of Instagram for the presentation of material. This material could have been presented elsewhere. The author cites an improvement in speech and listening. However, these benefits are based on several conditions. The students had to fully participate in the learning activities, they also have to engage in self-study and have fast access to mobile internet. Also, some of the students in the research expressed discontent with the Instagram. They would have preferred the videos to be on YouTube as YouTube videos can be paused and Instagram videos cannot (at the time of the research). Another student expressed concerns with the abuse of Instagram, but no further details are provided on what this means. On the other hand, positive perceptions of students focused on the accessibility and that it could be used anywhere anytime. While this research analyses Instagram as a learning platform, there doesn't seem to be any student-student or student-teacher interaction on the platform. It was merely the placing of

materials on Instagram. However, even though the students approved of the accessibility of the material in the experiment, the research charting the number of logins to the videos are up and down 8% logging in once, 16% logging in twice and 76% logging in three times. The students perceive it as convenient, yet they are not all interacting with it equally. (Khalitova 2016)

Rinda et al (2018) this piece of research presents Pros and Cons. The Pros are that students writing on Instagram helped with grammar, spelling and vocabulary. Also, Rinda et al notes that idea generation and self-correction improved. On a social level it nurtured social interaction amongst the students. However, when it comes to Cons, the participants found negative comments and over correction frustrating. It forced them to check (possibly over check) to avoid negativity. Also, the Ads distracted students. A note about this specific research is that the students had to use their personal internet data to access the internet. One of the recommendations was the need to maximize the teacher's role. This research seems to have concerns mostly associated with interaction and social aspects of the network. (Rinda et al. 2018) Pujiati et al (2019) research is about using Instagram to improve motivation and skills. The author quotes a scenario in which Instagram stories are used in the following way: Step 1 involves the teacher posting an image or text on stories, Step 2 the teacher posts questions, Step 3 the teacher posts a poll and finally Step 4 the teacher checks their Instagram stories for responses/answers. However, it is noted that students have only 24 hours to participate, as Instagram disappear after a day. Pujiati hails this as motivating students. The author also notes that students can find other learning sources beside official exercised provided by their teacher. They are encouraged to do tasks independently. And competition between the students is encouraged. Positive feedback from teachers and peers is seen to be a motivating factor in improving the student's motivation. While the outlined exercise is an interesting use of Instagram, it is difficult to see how the students perceive it. Yes, they are motivated to compete against each other and please the teacher, however, the idea of competing students and peer feedback may just be highlighting that the students enjoy the competition aspect rather than perceiving it as formal education. Also, if they are encouraged to seek alternative sources and engage with them independently, it is hardly formal learning. How do you assess their progress using random exercises? Also, are the student's being exposed to different English dialects? (Pujiati et al 2019).

Aloraini (2018) Carried out a study on Instagram and directly researches EFL student's interactions on Instagram and looks for changes in Vocabulary and Grammar Output and Feedback. She begins with discussing Instagram popularity amongst EFL students and their use of comments, likes and direct messaging for their studies. She highlights the increase in popularity of EFL Instagram pages, however it is noted that these 'teaching' profiles are run by experienced learners and not certified teachers. However, she still posits Instagram as being useful for output, feedback and language production opportunities. Aloraini examines the responses to 27 Vocabulary and 28 Grammar posts. She uses a cross section of 15 student Instagram accounts. This resulted in 140 response comments being analyzed (equally divided between Grammar and Vocabulary) After detailed data analysis she discovered that the vocabulary posts increased output in the comments of the posts. However, this increase in output did not lead to an increase in accuracy or feedback. It is also noted that in compiling the data they had to omit comments thanking the Instagram page for the post, copying and pasting, discussing previous posts or language topics and L1 comments. Aloraini attributes poor quality output to a mismatched level of English in the post to the Students Level of English. Aloraini attributes the feedback issues to accounts having large number of followers making it difficult to attend to each comment. It seems that while the students were commenting, they were not engaging in formal learning, and some of the comments (e.g., the thanking, L1 comments) were just social. The feedback came from poster and peer accounts and some from external Instagram users giving feedback (Aloraini 2018) Handayani (2019) is cited widely by authors in the Instagram section of the literature review and is held as a standard reference point for the other authors, this is due to the detail she goes into describing activities and exercises for Instagram. So, we will be looking into her research in detail, especially her examples of different exercises and activities. She describes Instagram as being popular and useful for students to collaborate and share, with easy access to student's friends, news and entertaining content. She says that this is an ideal platform for teachers to develop creative classroom activities. Handayani outlines detailed activities for the Instagram Application (App) across the four skills (Speaking, Reading, Writing, Listening). Starting with Speaking activities, she begins by noting that there can be a lack of motivation and interest in the classroom, and this can make students passive during exercises. She hails Instagram as useful to increase motivation using the following bespoke activities. (a) Capture Filed Trip Memories. This exercise involves students taking photos from their holidays or a weekend away posting them on Instagram and talking about their experiences in class. Students are encouraged to check out the photos on the app and to like them. The problem with this exercise is that the students are just using the app to socialize, and all the learning appears to occur in the classroom. (b) Review a historical figure. This involves looking up an historical figure on Instagram and talking about them in class, this exercise seems to have the same issue as the first exercise, the students are just using Instagram as a source and all the discussion and learning is taking place in the classroom. Also, Instagram is global, so when students look up an historical figure on Instagram, they may get an alternative narrative on their historical figure form a profile outside their socio-political region or they might find memes mocking their historical figure. This could cause confusion and conflict. (c) Role Play. This is a role play using the video option on Instagram, the only issue with this is that Instagram videos are so short and while the students are focused on the video they may miss out on non-verbal-ques or body language. (d) Pronunciation Plus. Teachers pronounce words on Instagram and students repeat, they locate the exercise using hashtags. This seems to be a legitimate exercise, however, there is the question of context of the pronunciation and the privacy of the students, as anyone can see a hashtag post. Then we have Reading Activities. (a) Share Reading Recommendation. This is when students comment on an image of the cover of a recommended book or perform a summary on video (under 20 seconds though). However, even though all of this activity is on Instagram, it seems to be mostly peer communication. Also, it is followed up by formal classroom learning. This means it is not formal learning through Instagram alone. This leads us to writing activities. (a) Caption it! Handayani cites a common problem of difficulty in discovering ideas or inspiration. So, the teacher posts a photo, and the students write a caption for it in the comments, in turn they use this for ideas. To make it challenging, the teacher may ask for specific structures to be used. The best caption may also get a prize. This is interesting; however, it is clearly for advanced and very confident students. The competitive element seems to favor the idea that it is peer learning above formal. (b) Photo Inspiration. The

teacher shares a photo with questions and the students comment or vice versa. Handayani states that students may be more careful writing if they know the whole world can see. This is a contradiction to her earlier claims of encouraging passive students. If the whole world is watching the passive students might shy away. Also, there is the issue of being able to edit Instagram posts after they are posted, this may lead to some cheating amongst the more competitive students. The use of Instagram in Writing seems to focus here on short pieces and not long narratives which is another constraint of the platform. Also, it is strongly peer and student focused with the teacher only getting involved after all the work is done and not assisting during the process. Finally, we have Listening activities. (a) 'Listening to the Natives' this is where students are directed to watch a video of L1 English speakers, however, the discussion of the content takes place in a classroom scenario, so this is something that could be done by simply showing the students a YouTube video or DVD. After examining the different methods outlined by Handayani, it appears that a lot of the activities end up being assessed or completed in the classroom. She claims it as being a 'back door for shy students' but if the world can see what the students are doing then the students may shy away from such exposure. So, it appears that it is all peer learning or socialization on the app with the added disadvantage of it being very public. (Handayani 2019)

After looking at the research on Instagram as a learning tool it is clear that it is perceived as a platform for peer learning and socialization rather than a formal learning tool. Gonzaga (2020) talks about the usefulness of features on Instagram and how the students enjoy using them for sharing and posting, however there is little mention of formal learning outcomes or results. (Gonzaga 2020). Then we have Mansor (2017). Mansor cites the utility of comments. She discusses a study carried out on a student project on Instagram, but, she fails to disclose whether the comments were the students socializing or actually comments on academic issues relating to the project itself. (Mansor 2017). Wulandari (2019) engaged with the video feature on Instagram. The students interacted with it, but, they only provided brief answers due to the limitations on video length. This may lead to deliberate omissions by students. If you are to develop fluency and formal learning, then certainly you would need a platform that could adapt to longer narratives. (Wulandari 2019). Another supporter of Instagram is Erarslan (2019). Erarslan sets out to discuss the benefits of Instagram and seeks to introduce it as a new learning platform. However, his own research shows that the students perceived the platform as an interactive place for students alone. So, this is strictly peer-learning, and it has no formal teacher-student interactions. (Erarslan 2019). Similarly, Hape (2019) shows little student-teacher interaction all peer-interaction. This research also makes a lot of assumptions on access to data and wi-fi. If students find it difficult to connect to an app then they may perceive it differently or informal. (Hape 2019). Khalitova (2016) studies Instagram use and posits its usefulness for self-study but highlights a constraint of connectivity speed. Khalitova mentions some abuse on Instagram as being an issue, which may counteract the motivating element of convenience. The author states that students perceive Instagram as convenient, but they were not all accessing it equally. (Khalitova 2016) In Rinda et al (2018) we find that the students found over correction by teachers on Instagram frustrating. The Ads were distracting. Rinda highlighted that Instagram use required more teacher interaction. So, it appears there was a lack of formal learning in this project. (Rinda et al 2018). Pujiati et al (2019) shows that Instagram use is more about access, the research outlines uses such as using external exercise and students learning in their own time. Also, Pujiati does not distinguish between public and private Instagram accounts. Basically, this is all about the students using their own accounts in their own time and there doesn't seem to be any criteria for assessing their progress or outcomes (Pujiati 2019). A more detailed project was Aloraini (2018). The author examined student's progress after interacting with bespoke Instagram exercise. The outcomes were raised output, but not raised accuracy. The research examined comments related to the exercise however it omitted social posts (L1, thanks and previous exercises from the experiment). So, clearly there was a lot of socialization and peer interaction which was omitted from the final statistical model. Aloraini also stated that there was feedback online from sources outside the experiment, that doesn't seem very formal. (Aloraini 2018). Finally, we have Handayani (2019) this research is cited by most of the authors above as it provides examples of possible Instagram exercises. However, a lot of the exercises are assessed in the classroom, the students just sourced the information on Instagram. So, the students are really just using Instagram as a resource rather than a learning platform. Handayani hails Instagram as being a 'back door for shy students'. She also says that if 'the world' can see what the students are writing on Instagram they will be more careful. But if 'the world' can see what the students are doing then the students may shy away from such exposure. So, it appears that it is all peer learning or socialization on the app with the added disadvantage of it being very public. (Handayani 2019) After analyzing the previous research on Instagram as a learning tool, it appears that the (well-intentioned and interesting) exercises rely on peer learning and study outside the classroom with little formal learning or online supervision or teaching. Also, in research such as Aloraini (2018) the students used the comment section on the Instagram project to post social messages such as 'thank you' and L1 comments. So clearly the students perceive Instagram learning as social. Also, it is noted in research such as Handayani (2019) that the students Instagram comments and exercise were corrected in the classroom which defeats the purpose and convenience of having the exercise online in the first place. Surely, if the learning was formal the students would have been corrected on the app itself.

4.2 Specific Features

Some researchers focused on specific features of a network, Gonzaga (2020) praises a lot of Instagram features, and the enjoyment students take from them, however there's little mention of any formal learning, just socializing. (Gonzaga 2020). Mansor (2017) likes Instagram comments because students enjoy them, but, no distinction is made between academic and social use. (Mansor 2017). Aloraini (2018) also liked Instagram comments, however most of the students in the project posted social messages such as 'thank you' and L1 comments (Aloraini 2018). Handayani (2019) had teachers correct Instagram comments in the classroom which defeats the purpose and convenience of having the exercise online in the first place. (Handayani 2019). Wulandari (2019) on the other hand, likes Instagram videos, however the students only gave brief answers due to short video times and engagement was limited. (Wulandari 2019). Tananuraksakul (2015) examined students' attitudes and motivation on Facebook Groups. Beginner students thrived on direct correction by the teacher, others were less enthusiastic. Some students spent more time using Facebook generally, than on the specific Facebook Group. (Tananuraksakul 2015). F Blattner G Flori M (2009) seems to be another fan of

Facebook groups. They hail improvements in students' relationships and the student community, the focus here is on the social benefits of online learning (Blattner G Flori M 2009). So, by looking at special features highlighted by these researchers the students perceived the use of comments, videos or groups as more of a social act than formal education.

4.3 Students Alone

Khalitova (2016) focuses on self-study. Khalitova mentions some abuse on Instagram as being an issue. The author states that students perceive Instagram as convenient, but they were not all accessing it equally. (Khalitova 2016) (Yang P 2017). Aloraini (2018) examined student's progress after interacting with bespoke Instagram exercise. The research examined comments related to the exercise however it omitted social posts (L1, thanks and previous exercises from the experiment). So, clearly there was a lot of socialization and peer interaction which was omitted from the final statistical model. Aloraini 2018 Erarslan (2019) shows that the students perceived Instagram as an interactive place for students alone. (Erarslan 2019). Handayani (2019) praises Instagram as being a 'back door for shy students. She also says that if 'the world' can see what the students are writing on Instagram they will be more careful. (Handayani 2019) Hape (2019) shows little student-teacher interaction and all peer-interaction on Instagram (Hape 2019). Pujiati et al (2019) outlines Instagram uses such as using external exercise and students learning in their own time. (Chen IC 2020) It is clear from the above research that social media is a very social tool, however, this is not always a positive thing in education. The students were praised for their communication on the tools by the different researchers, but, they were encouraged to use it without supervision. Without the teacher's supervising or correcting the posts of the students, the students perceive it as a social activity. Also, in Alnastheh et al (2018) students were preoccupied with giving a positive image of themselves online. (Alnastheh et al 2018) Admittedly, some of the social activity may be discussing school and exercises, however, when the activities are self or student administered, it is difficult to see where formal learning would fit in.

4.4 Teacher interaction

Another area was teacher interaction. If the students are learning formally on social media, then they should require a certain amount of interaction or correction by teachers, or at the very least a significant amount of moderation. When a social media network is used for teaching then it is part of the learning environment, and if it is part of the formal curriculum or syllabus then the teacher should be interacting with their students. Rinda et al (2018) found that students found correction by teachers on Instagram frustrating yet insisted that Instagram use required more teacher interaction. (Rinda et al 2018) (Sakkir 2018). In the case of Rinda it appears the students did not want the teacher interacting with them on Instagram (Rinda et al. 2018) (Sakkir 2018) So, it appears that the students did not want the teachers on their Instagram, or, through the design of social media use, they enjoyed using Facebook, in the classroom, as opposed to interacting with the teacher who was present at the time.

4.5 Adapting the Application

While some of the research can be categorized as leaning towards social or lacking in formal structure. There is also research that posits different ways of using social media applications for teaching. These researchers saw a way forward that may change student perceptions of social media learning from socialization to formal learning. If educators could adapt elements of these three researchers into one program, it would go a long way to formalize perceptions. For example, if you introduced a formal structure (Upadhyay 2018), then formal grading (Hamidon et al 2013), followed by the students only using a social media app for education (Caliboso 2021), you would have a very formal version of social media learning and students' perceptions would become more formal.

We have examined research on Instagram in education and the classroom. Most of the research comes from an enthusiastic viewpoint, where the researchers are eager to promote its use. However, there is other research which has a more cynical viewpoint of the use of social media by students. There is Auramenko & Nerantzi (2019), They talk about how social media is distracting students. They highlight that social media is used in lectures, not as a learning tool but as a 'Technological Break' to entertain themselves Auramenko & Nerantzi (2019). Kanachi (2019) who suggests that students who are weaker academically and don't study, are the same students who are spending a lot of time on Facebook (Kawachi 2019)

There is also the issue of Digital Body Language (Dhawan 2021) This is the perception users online have of each other based on their online activity. Alnatshesh et al (2018) and Mansor (2017) are just two of the researchers who discuss how useful social media is for shy students or gives them more confidence if they are not in a physical classroom. However, Digital Body Language or worrying about your online profile (as in Alnatshesh et al) can have a negative effect on students' confidence. Dhawan (2021) outlines Digital Stressors, these are negative perceptions a user may have of their own activity. These include worrying about your volume of text or over-commenting, worrying about perceptions others have of your or your ideas, and worrying if others will interpret your text or comments incorrectly. If a shy student is faced with these worries on top of their classroom worries. This could lead to alienation online and in the classroom. It is difficult to see how their confidence would improve. Dhawan also raises the issue of Cross-Cultural communication, which is especially relevant in TESOL as there may be many different cultures in a class. She categorizes cultures into two categories: High-Context Cultures (Mediterranean, Central Europe, Latin America, Africa and East Asia), which rely on non-verbal cues in communication. Low-Context Explicit Verbal Cultures (U.S. U.K. Western Europe), which rely on explicit verbal communication. Dhawan posits that this could cause conflict online, with the Low-Context Cultures and High-Context Cultures misinterpreting each other (Dhawan 2021). Even though Dhawan's division of communication doesn't allow for any grey areas in the Cultural Context Definitions, it is worthy to note that such differences could cause communication issues and conflict.

Another cause for concern is highlighted by Lanier J (2018) who claims that social media is making expression meaningless. The concern is aimed at women and girls on social media, their expressions can be sexualized or incorporated into a violent or manipulative framework. Lanier explains that online presences can lead to humiliation, shame and harassment of female users. The reason given for this is social medias ability to 'mash up' meaning. Comments and photos may be contextualized and assigned

different meanings by algorithms and other users. It is impossible to determine how anything posted on social media will be interpreted or whether the reaction will be positive or negative. Lanier further explains that when the context of comments is determined by the social media application environment and culture, communication can become 'petty, shallow and predictable' (Lanier 2018) This is a far cry from Sah (2015), Alquanayeer (2016), Erarslan (2019), Hape (2018) and Handayani (2019) assertions that social media is a safe place for shy students to express themselves.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

After examining different research on Instagram, in relation to Student's perception of these social media networks. In research by Gonzaga (2020), Mansor (2017), Aloranini (2018), Handayani (2019), Wulandari (2019) Tananurkasakul (2015) and Blattner, Flori (2009), specific features such as the use of comments, videos and groups were viewed by students as more of a social act rather than formal education. In other research, namely Mork (2009), Sah (2015), Khalitova (2016), Dweikat (2016) Yang (2017) Aloraini (2018), Alnastehh (2018) and Eninci, Kaya (2018), there was a strong leaning towards students learning alone with social media amongst themselves, socially. Students learning socially was supported by theories on teacher interaction on social media. This was more of a question of access to the teacher; however, the teacher-students interaction was more of a social connection/correction than formal learning (Alquanayeer 2016) and students did not always approve of teachers interrupting them on social media, their social space. (Rinda et al 2018). Of course there was also the issue of which application was in use, Students who liked socializing on different platforms didn't like using Twitter (Espinoza-Celi, Pintado 2020) (Arantini et al 2021). So, even though the students may have improved in communication, there were no real formal examinations on the Social Media Exercises (Hamidon et al 2013) (Upadhyay 2018) and certain in the context of the use of Special Features, Students working alone, Teacher Interaction and Twitter Hesitancy, the students did not perceive the use of social media networks as formal learning. This has direct implication for the hypothesis.

In the case of hypothesis 1. 'The students perceive that they are benefitting from peer interaction and their grades are improving because of increased socialization' The students do perceive social media as a tool for socialization and they claim they are benefitting from its use. However, there is no way to say if their grades are improving from increased socialization, the research only provides results based on the immediate experiments. Then we have hypothesis 2. 'The students are benefitting from formal learning on social media platforms' This is clearly unproven, the students do not perceive the learning on social media as formal as the learning on social media had no context in their formal learning, i.e., there was no formal grading system, rubric or structure in place.

5.2 Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to prove whether or not the students perceived the use of Social Media as a beneficial form of socialization or formal education. Overall, it is safe to say that while the students enjoyed using the social media tools, they did perceive it mostly as a communication tool and a lot of the research was focused on improving students independent use of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (see the commonalities section). The teacher's involvement in the student's education on social media was sometimes perceived as intrusive (intrusive to the student's socialization). It is difficult to tell if the students grades improved substantially, however, according to the research the students clearly viewed it as more of a social tool to talk about their exercises rather than use it for their exercises. The students were not benefitting from formal learning on these networks. However, in the Adapting the Application section we see the research revealed some ideas which could transform students' perceptions of social media in education from social to formal.

5.3 Recommendations

Moving Forward to the Future

While the students perceived the use of social media as socialization, all is not lost for Instagram and similar networks. They can be adapted to formal learning. Hamidon I.S. et al. (2013) suggests that introducing a more formal method of grading could be a way forward in the use of Twitter. With formal grading applied to the student's educational Tweets, they would certainly perceive it as formal education and not just socialization. (Hamidon et al. 2013) On a more structured level Upadhyay S (2018) proposes a conceptual model for using Twitter. Upadhyay's structure fits between formal and socialization. It is a middle ground of formal educational socialization. (Upadhyay 2018). Then we have F Caliboso JC (2021) This Caliboso emphasizes the need for teacher supervision and for students to be only allowed to use Facebook for the class project and not for personal use. This would certainly be a way forward to formalizing Facebook learning perceptions. However, even though it would be a great idea, it is hard to imagine how it would be implemented. (Caliboso JC 2021). These researchers saw a way forward that may change student perceptions of social media learning from socialization to formal learning. If educators could adapt elements of these three researchers into one program, it would go a long way to formalize perceptions. For example, if you introduced a formal structure (Upadhyay 2018), then formal grading (Hamidon et al 2013), followed by the students only using a social media app for education (Caliboso 2021), you would have a very formal version of social media learning and students' perceptions would become more formal. There is also Sah (2015) who suggests some sort of Social, Moral and Linguistic training may be required before use. (Sah 2015). It is possible that if the above suggestions were introduced into social media use in education it would be more formal or structured and then students may perceive it as so. Further research needs to be done, possibly integrating the methods mentioned above. This would allow us to see if social media could be more useful as a formal educational tool if its use was adapted within a more formal educational structure.

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