THE EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES OF ENGLISH STUDENTS REGARDING THE USE OF INSTAGRAM AS A LANGUAGE LEARNING TOOL

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Bachelor's Thesis
English
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Communication Studies
University of Jyväskylä
May 2024

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty	Laitos - Department
Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen	Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos

Tekijä - Author

Mirella Herrala

Työn nimi - Title

The experiences and attitudes of English students regarding the use of Instagram as a language learning tool

Oppiaine - Subject	Työn laji - Level
Englannin kieli	Kandidaatintutkielma

Aika – Month and year	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
Toukokuu 2024	31

Tiivistelmä - Abstract

Sosiaalisen median sekä teknologian kasvun myötä tehdyt tutkimukset ovat rohkaisseet opettajia puhelinten käytöstä koulun sisäisissä oppimistilanteissa ja koulun ulkopuolella. Puhelinten ajatellaan olevan erityisen hyödyllisiä sanaston ja lausumisen oppimisessa. Sosiaalinen media voi lisäksi motivoida kielenoppimista tarjoamalla mahdollisuuksia kommunikoida muiden kielenoppijoiden kanssa. Instagramin käytöstä kielenoppimisen välineenä on tehty aiempia tutkimuksia, mutta ei juurikaan Suomessa. Lisäksi monet kokemuksiin ja mielipiteisiin liittyvät tutkimukset ovat keskittyneet muiden alojen opiskelijoihin, eikä niinkään kieltenopiskelijoihin.

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee Instagramin käyttöä kielenoppimisessa. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää englanninopiskelijoiden kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä Instagramin käyttämisestä englannin oppimisen välineenä. Tutkimus suoritettiin kertaluontoisena verkkokyselynä, johon osallistui 29 suomea äidinkielenään puhuvaa englannin pää- ja sivuaineopiskelijaa. Vastaukset analysoitiin määrällisesti sekä laadullisia sisällönanalyysin menetelmiä käyttäen.

Tulokset osoittavat, että englanninopiskelijat seuraavat pääosin englanninkielisiä vaikuttajia tai brändejä sekä käyttävät usein englantia kommunikoidessa muiden kanssa. Noin puolet vastaajista oli sitä mieltä, että Instagram on ollut heille tärkeä väline englannin oppimisessa. Suurimmalla osalla vastaajista oli positiivisia näkemyksiä Instagramista englannin oppimisen välineenä, vaikka moni ajatteli alustan tuottavan vaikeuksia uusille kielenoppijoille. Mahdollisiksi haittapuoliksi esitettiin alustalla esiintyvä informaali kielenkäyttö, jonka vuoksi kielenoppijat saattavat oppia lauserakenteita ja sanamuotoja väärin.

Tutkimuksen tuloksista on hyötyä esimerkiksi kielenoppijoille, jotka haluavat kehittää kielitaitoaan informaaleissa ja luonnollisissa ympäristöissä. Lisäksi tulokset antavat tietoa sosiaalisen median hyödyistä opettajille ja vanhemmille.

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1   INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology in the last few decades has made it possible for people to connect with others around the world. Mobile technologies and new social media apps are continuously making it easier for people to chat, argue and flirt with others online. Along with various social media platforms, Instagram is one of the most popular social media applications in the 21st century (El Kamili, 2023). While some may argue that the platform is a detriment to one's self-esteem and attention span, it also offers some benefits. Instagram offers a great variety of ways to learn a language. There are many accounts dedicated to language learning, and the chat function and comment sections allow users to interact with anyone around the world. It offers an authentic way to use and learn languages which formal education often does not offer. Because of the nature of the application, language learning is often incidental which means that users can unintentionally learn language skills such as grammar, vocabulary or writing while using the app (see, e.g., Harmaini & Nanda, 2023). In addition, Instagram provides a motivational aspect for language learning because users can look at content according to their interests and interact with other users in the same community. A study by Lee (2023) noted that users of Instagram and TikTok repurpose different affordances within the applications for language learning purposes. These language learning affordances depend on the users and the way they use the applications. Therefore, despite not being designed for learning purposes, Instagram can be utilized as a language learning tool.

According to Kukulska-Hulme, Norris, and Donohue (2015, p. 7), active participation in language learning requires the students to be responsible for their own learning. Mobile technologies offer an easy way for students to participate in ways which used to be impossible. They can communicate with people all around the world, create and share various types of multimodal texts, and analyze their own language progress just with their own mobile devices. Mobile learning offers many language learning opportunities, such as using language in real world contexts, and learning how to use, rehearse, and experiment with the language. Therefore,

Instagram can be considered a useful tool for learning languages for its availability and motivational aspects.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and language learning within social networks have been studied widely, but studies from Finnish perspective have been scarce. Multiple studies have been conducted on language learning in social networks. Many of them focus on the learner profiles and characteristics, or the language learning attitudes of language learners (see, e.g., Dincer, 2020; Zarei & Rudravarapu, 2020). Instagram as a language learning tool has been widely studied, and many previous studies have displayed positive attitudes towards it. However, some studies have displayed concerns for potential challenges, but the focus has mainly been on the benefits.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and attitudes of Finnish university students studying English regarding the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The aim is to find out how the students use English within the application, their experiences on learning English through Instagram, and their thoughts on the possible benefits and harms that the application might offer for language learners.

The present study is divided into five sections, including the introduction. The next section focuses on the theoretical background and previous studies conducted on the topic. The following section introduces the present study's aims, methods, and participants. The next section contains the analysis of the data. Lastly, the findings, implications, and limitations of the present study are discussed and some suggestions for future research are proposed.

2 BACKGROUND

This section focuses on the theoretical background of technology-based language learning which is divided into three subsections. The first subsection presents technologies used in language learning and the benefits they offer for language learners. The second subsection covers social networks and the key aspects that can assist learners with language learning. The last subsection introduces a few previous studies conducted on using Instagram as a language learning tool.

2.1 Technologies in language learning and teaching

According to Choi and Nunan (2018), for learners to acquire sufficient language skills, they must practice language skills outside of formal language education. The informal context gives the learners an opportunity to practice language in authentic contexts and acquire skills that may not be practiced in a traditional language classroom. However, a classroom offers a safe and structured environment because of the predictable language used in conversation tasks, and a chance for learners to receive feedback and advice from the teacher. Informal language contexts are more unpredictable, and the learners have to communicate without the safety net that textbooks and teachers offer.

The introduction of digital technologies into language classrooms offers a way to close this gap between formal and informal instruction (Kukulska-Hulme, 2015, as cited in Lee, 2020, p. 155). The research on the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has encouraged the use of digital technologies in language classrooms, but also outside of formal education (Lee, 2020, p.155). Even though the research on using CALL in technology-enhanced language instruction has increased a lot during the past years (Farr & Murray, 2016; Thomas, Reinders & Warschauer, 2013, as cited in Lee, 2018, p. 155), the use of social network technologies such as mobile apps is still relatively new in language classrooms (Lee, 2020, p. 156). However,

Cho et al. (2018, p. 16) contradict this by arguing that due to the fast growth of mobile technologies and educational applications, many studies have been conducted on the use of mobile technologies in classrooms. Therefore, educators have started utilizing mobile technologies not only in classrooms, but also integrating them into informal education settings (Traxler & Kukulska-Hulme, 2005, as cited in Cho et al., 2018, p. 16).

Mobile learning has been found to have at least one certain benefit compared to other forms of e-learning which is learner mobility (Khemaja & Taamallah, 2016; Pisey & Ramteke, 2012, as cited in Cho et al., 2018, p. 17). Learning is not restricted to a certain time or place and mobile phones are almost always present in day-to-day life (Traxler & Kukulska-Hulme, 2005, as cited in Cho et al., 2018, p. 17), compared to e-learning which usually takes place in a classroom (Cakmak 2019). Additionally, mobile learning offers adaptability to rapidly changing contexts (Cakmak, 2019).

According to Cho et al. (2018, p. 18), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is an approach to language learning which utilizes mobile technology and focuses on providing help with communication and obtaining linguistic skills and knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammatical structures, pronunciation, spelling, and punctuation. Mobile learning is found to be exceptionally beneficial for acquiring vocabulary and learning pronunciation (Zhang, Song & Burston, 2011; Murat, Gölge & Kürsat, 2009). Mobile devices offer some advantages compared to traditional language learning since they are portable and hold a wide variety of different features and applications, making them a multifaceted tool for language learning. However, MALL environments can create some challenges. Cakmak (2019, p. 33) argues that mobile devices and social networks can be distracting and divert the focus from language learning to something else. On the other hand, because of their portability and the chance to use them anywhere and anytime, the learners might experience interaction overload which might leave the learner feeling overwhelmed.

Kukulska-Hulme (2016) points out that MALL literature often focuses on the formal learning contexts even though it offers a wide variety of informal learning affordances. Informal language learning may progress if the learner utilizes the many forms of assistance, such as help, collaboration, helpful resources, and supportive words. The assistance may come from teachers, peers, materials, technologies, and the physical environment in which the language is being learned. However, too much assistance may leave the learner feeling like they do not have

enough power to facilitate their own learning, whereas too little assistance may leave them feeling stranded. Therefore, integrating digital technologies into language classrooms could be beneficial since students will be able to practice their language skills individually while still having the support of peers and teachers.

2.2   Social networks and language learning

According to Lee (2020, p. 157), there are multiple terms for social media, such as Web 2.0, social networking, and social networks. These all share key features such as content creativity, community building, connectivity, and widened audience (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, as cited in Lee, 2020, p. 157). Social networking allows people to exchange content to wide audiences (Lamy & Zourou, 2013, as cited in Lee, 2020, p. 157), creating opportunities for involving in communities all around the world with shared interests (Lee, 2020, p. 156). Social media has evolved from Web 2.0, such as blogs and wikis to social networks, such as Instagram and Facebook over the years with each platform offering different affordances and opportunities (Lee, 2020, p. 156).

According to Lee (2020, pp. 157-159), social networking offers authentic learning contexts that can increase learners' socio-pragmatic and social collaboration skills. She introduces few of these key aspects that may be of assistance for language learning, the first being motivation and engagement. Due to its social nature and the chance to interact with other users, digital media can increase students' motivation for language learning purposes. Lantz-Andersson (2016, as cited in Lee, 2020, p. 158) mentions that social networking communities offer a chance for informal and unplanned use of language in casual communication which prepares language learners for using the language in real world. Lee (2020, pp. 157-159) continues that the possibility to interact with native speakers may increase motivation for language learning, but students might not maintain the same level of engagement which requires teachers to set clear expectations for online communication. Social networks also offer a chance for language learners to improve their digital literacy skills which are necessary for participating, interacting, and collaborating in social language learning environments (Reinhardt and Thorne, 2019, as cited in Lee, 2020, pp. 157-158). The next aspect Lee (2020, pp. 158-159) introduces is learner autonomy. Self-directed learning is considered one of the most important factors in technology-driven language learning. Both individual and social factors influence how engaged learners

are. Individual factors include personal knowledge, skills and capacities, and social factors include collaboration with others and shared responsibilities. Learners with strong self-regulation skills, strong beliefs about the language being learned and confidence in their language ability use mobile technologies in language learning more likely than those with poor self-regulation skills and language-related insecurities. The last key aspect introduced is social networks which can help learners with constructing their social identities built through social interaction. For example, Instagram allows users to build their self-identities by posting pictures and building communities with others who share similar cultural identities or interests.

Instagram offers all of these key aspects that can assist with language learning. The social nature of the platform can motivate language learners especially for the chance to interact with others in communities with shared interests, simultaneously building one's social identities. Engagement in a community enables the chance to learn languages and becoming more confident in the language being learned. Digital literacy skills are also an important factor since Instagram consists of many different communities. The user has to be capable of finding suitable communities, but also being capable of using suitable language.

2.3   Instagram as a language learning tool

Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of Instagram as a language learning tool, such as a study which focused on students' perceptions of language learning through Instagram by Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih (2020). The study focused on students' attitudes and their experiences with using Instagram for language learning purposes after using it for a speaking task. 80 students were given a task to post a speaking video on Instagram and after that they answered an online survey regarding the experience. A second survey was used to explore students' attitudes towards using Instagram as a language learning tool, and 148 students responded. The study revealed that the students had positive attitudes towards using Instagram as a language learning tool. In addition, the students felt that using Instagram helped with acquiring vocabulary.

Gonulal's (2019) study explored how English language learners use Instagram for language learning purposes and as a MALL tool. The study focused on finding out what different language learning habits and profiles existed among English language learners and what their

attitudes were towards using Instagram as a MALL tool. The study consisted of 97 participants. Most of the English language learners used Instagram actively for language learning purposes and showed positive attitudes towards using it as an informal way of learning a language. The participants found it to be a motivating and an interesting way to learn English, and the platform encouraged them to use English more often. The participants, as well as in Lailiyah's and Setiyaningsih's (2020) study also found Instagram being particularly helpful for learning new vocabulary. In addition, Instagram promotes a sense of community which makes it easy for language learners to improve their communication skills. However, the participants found that informal language is often used in Instagram, making it harder to learn grammar and structure.

El Kamili's (2023) study also focused on young adult learners' attitudes towards using Instagram as a tool for improving language proficiency. This study, similarly to Lailiyah's and Setiyaningshi's (2020) and Gonulal's (2019) studies also demonstrated that the learners had positive attitudes towards Instagram as a language learning tool. The results highlighted the opportunity to communicate globally and the chance for meaningful interaction. Over half of the participants (n=12) agreed that Instagram is a natural and an encouraging place for practicing English. They also experienced that their vocabulary and English proficiency had improved since they began interacting with other users within the platform. As Gonulal's (2019) study already indicated difficulties with informal language, some participants in this study expressed that they had some trouble understanding native speakers due to their fast-paced way of talking. Other possible challenges were the unfamiliar vocabulary and the distracting nature of the platform. Overall, Instagram is thought to be a suitable tool for language learning purposes. Previous studies indicate that it is particularly suitable for learning vocabulary and communication skills. However, some previous studies have found that the informal use of language within the platform might pose challenges for language learners, which is a topic to be studied further.

3   THE PRESENT STUDY

This section is divided into three subsections, of which the first one concentrates on the aim and the research questions of the study. The study aims to answer three research questions, which are listed below. The next subsection introduces the data and respondents of the study. The last section focuses on the methods of analysis.

3.1   Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and attitudes of Finnish university students studying English regarding the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The rapid development of technology has opened new grounds for language learning, students no longer having to be confined in formal education to learn new languages. A multitude of different language learning applications and websites have been developed for the growing number of language learners, but some may argue that they lack natural communication. Thus, researchers have considered different social media sites as a comfortable way to learn languages (see, e.g., Kitchakarn, 2016). Instagram as a language learning tool has been studied previously, but this study aims to offer new insights on the topic by answering the following questions:

1. What kinds of experiences do English students have with using and learning English on Instagram?
2. What kinds of attitudes do English students have towards learning English on Instagram?
3. What are the perceived benefits or harms of Instagram as a language learning tool?

3.2   Data and respondents

The respondents of the study are Finnish-speaking students, who study English as their major or minor subject at a university in Finland. The data were gathered with an online survey using Webropol. The form was sent using a university mailing list, and the survey was open for one week. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and ethical matters were clarified with a privacy notice. Answering to the survey did not require releasing personal information, and the responses to the open-ended questions do not include identifiable information of the participants. The survey gathered in total of 29 respondents.

The survey was split into two sections. The first section touches on the English students' personal experiences of using Instagram and the language learning opportunities the application has offered. The section consists of two questions regarding the use of English within the platform, and three questions regarding the students' experiences with learning English through Instagram. The second section consists of six questions and focuses on the attitudes and perceived benefits or disadvantages of Instagram as a language learning tool.

A survey as a data collection method was chosen for this study because it is a suitable method for collecting data on opinions, experiences, and attitudes (Vehkalahti, 2019). Questionnaires can be open or close-ended. According to Mackey and Gass (2016), close-ended questions offer uniformity which prompts better reliability, whereas in open-ended questions the answers may differ a lot. Predetermined answers can be easily quantified and analyzed. Open-ended questions can offer new insights into the topic being studied, but they require more work to analyze (Vehkalahti, 2019). This study utilizes both close-ended and open-ended questions in the questionnaire to gather data which can be quantified and might offer new perspectives on the topic (Vehkalahti, 2019). The answers to the close-ended questions are presented on a Likert scale, ranging from 1-6 (fully agree - fully disagree), or 1-5 (always – never). The scale from 1-6 prevents the user from using the middle option, ensuing better results.

3.3   Methods of analysis

The data are analyzed using two different methods. The ordinal data from closed questions are quantified, whereas the open-ended questions are analyzed by using content analysis (Denscombe, 2014). The data from the closed questions 1-4 and 6-10 are presented on tables.

Instead of human beings, content analysis focuses on messages as units of data and analysis (Neuendorf, 2016, p. 36). According to Gibbs and Flick (2018, p. 54), the data being analyzed are coded. Coding is used for categorizing and finding thematic ideas within the data, which enables two types of analysis. The first type of analysis can consist of extracts that share common ideas, explanations, activities, or phenomena. The second type of analysis examines the relationships between data. This study will utilize the first type of analysis by finding common themes from the answers to the open-ended questions.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided into two sections of which the first one focuses on the experiences of English students on using Instagram as a language learning tool. The analysis in the first section is split into two categories. The first category consists of the answers to two questions which gain some background information on the students' use of English on Instagram. The second category focuses on the students' experiences of language learning within Instagram. The second section of the analysis is also split into two categories, of which the first one targets the potential of Instagram as a language learning tool, and the second one focuses on the harms that the platform might pose for language learning.

4.1 English students' use of English on Instagram

Two of the questions in the first section focus on how English students use English on Instagram. In Question 1, the participants answered on a scale from 1=always to 5=never. In Question 2, they answered on a scale from 1=fully agree to 6=fully disagree. The most common responses have been highlighted.

Table 1: Question 1 results

"How often do you use English while communicating on Instagram? (e.g. story posts, private messages, comments)"				
Always	Often	Every now and then	Rarely	Never
6,9%	**44,8%**	37,9%	10,4%	0,0%

Almost half of the respondents use English often while communicating on Instagram. Over third of the respondents use English every now and then, and only a few use it rarely or always. None of the respondents answered "never".

Table 2: Question 3 results

"Almost all of the content creators or brands I follow on Instagram produce content in English"					
Fully agree	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree	Fully disagree
24,1%	**41,4%**	20,7%	3,5%	10,3%	0,0%

Most of the answers to Question 3 were leaning towards the positive end, with most of the respondents mainly following English content creators or brands. Only some of the respondents disagreed with the statement, but none of the respondents fully disagreed.

The responses indicate that English students often produce and consume content in English on Instagram. It is unclear whether they use English or Finnish more, since the survey only focused on the use of English, but the answers to Question 3 demonstrate that English students follow mainly English-speaking content creators or brands. Considering that only some of the respondents disagree suggests that they follow brands or content creators who mainly produce content in other languages. In conclusion, most of the respondents use English and consume English content often on Instagram.

4.2 English students′ experiences with learning English on Instagram

This section focuses on English students' experiences with learning English on Instagram. In Question 2, the participants answered on a scale from 1=always to 5=never. In Question 4, they answered on a scale from 1=fully agree to 6=fully disagree. Question 5 was an open-ended question, in which they could answer in any way they deemed fit. The most common answers in Table 3 and 4 have been highlighted.

Table 3: Question 2 results

"How often do you stumble across content dedicated to language learning?"				
Always	Often	Every now and then	Rarely	Never
0,0%	10,4%	**37,9%**	34,5%	17,2%

The answers to Question 2 suggest that English students do not often see content that is specifically dedicated to language learning. Said content can vary from posts dedicated to learning grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. 37,9% of the respondents come across this type of content every now and then, and approximately one third rarely see these types of posts. A few of the respondents often see posts dedicated to language learning and 17,2% never come across them. None of the respondents see this type of content every time they use Instagram.

There are a few possible explanations for the results. Those who do not specifically search for language learning content might not get as many posts related to that as those who actively use Instagram as a language learning tool. Those who are fluent in English might not engage with those type of posts or they might ignore them because they do not find them important enough.

Table 4: Question 4 results

"Instagram has been an important tool for me for learning English"					
Fully agree	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree	Fully disagree
10,4%	17,2%	**24,1%**	10,4%	**24,1%**	13,8%

Question 4 posed a wide variety of different answers. About half of the respondents agree with the statement and the rest disagree with it. "Slightly agree" got the most responses along with "strongly disagree", and both got 24,1% of the answers. The rest of the responses were evenly divided in the scale from fully agree to fully disagree.

The results suggest that some of the participants have found Instagram a beneficial tool for learning English, whereas some did not find it as important. Question 5 offered more insight on this theme, which will be discussed next.

Question 5: "In what ways have you learned English on Instagram?" was an open-ended question which prompted two types of answers. The first type of answer related to how the respondents have learned English and the second one related to what they have learned on Instagram. These two types of answers will be analyzed separately.

4.2.1 How English students have learned English on Instagram

The respondents listed multiple ways of how they have learned English on Instagram. The most frequently named ways were related to consuming English content, such as reading posts, comments, captions, stories, and following content creators or influencers who create content in English. One participant mentioned that learning vocabulary is inevitable while consuming content. There were also many mentions of Instagram helping the participants maintain and increase their language skills, such as:

Example 1.
(M)elkein kaikki seuraamani käyttäjät ovat englanninkielisiä. Sitä kautta oppii kun altistuu kielelle päivittäisessä käytössä.
Almost all of the users I follow speak English. In that way you learn when you get exposed to the language in daily use.

Some respondents have learned English by listening to videos or stories, thus practicing their listening comprehension skills. A few participants have practiced their English by communicating with others:

Example 2.
I had a fan account on Instagram, which I used in English. Through that I found friends and other creators, which helped me use English on a day-to-day basis.

In addition, one participant mentioned using English a bit more than Finnish while communicating and creating content on Instagram. Overall, participants felt that Instagram has helped

them increase and maintain their English skills, and practice reading and listening comprehension skills. Digital communities enable possibilities for language learners to learn languages through authentic communication (Lee, 2020, p. 157). Communities can enhance motivation and engagement, especially when they suit the learner's interests (Lee, 2020, p. 157). Therefore, using a fan account provides a motivational aspect for using a language by interacting with other fans.

4.2.2 What English students have learned on Instagram relating to language learning

Many of the responses to Question 5 mentioned having learned slang words and new vocabulary from Instagram. In total of 11 respondents have learned new vocabulary, with some learning new vocabulary related to specific themes such as music or fashion. One respondent mentioned learning new meanings for words and new contexts in which different words can be used. Another respondent mentioned learning different cultural and contextual words and phrases. Some of the respondents mentioned learning multiple things, such as:

Example 3.

Nuorempana sitä kun käytti aktiivisesti niin oppi miten nuoret puhuu englantia. Sanastoa, lyhenteitä ja muita puhekielisiä ilmaisuja. Myös oppi kommunikoimaan englanniksi kun jutteli ihmisten kanssa eri puolilta maailmaa.

When I used it when I was younger, I learned how the young speak English. Vocabulary, abbreviations, and other spoken phrases. I also learned how to communicate in English when I talked with other people from all around the world.

Many respondents have also learned different sayings and proverbs, and abbreviations. A few respondents mentioned learning about different accents and the differences between them. Instagram has also helped them with pronunciation. A few respondents felt that they have not learned English while using Instagram.

In conclusion, the majority of the respondents have learned English on Instagram. The most frequently mentioned theme was vocabulary, followed by slang words and sayings. The results suggest that Instagram is a suitable tool for learning new vocabulary, slang words, and learning in which contexts words or phrases could be used in. The results are comparable to findings by

Zhang, Song, and Burston (2011) and Murat, Gölge, and Kürsat (2009), who found that mobile learning is particularly helpful for learning vocabulary and pronunciation.

4.3   English students' attitudes on learning English on Instagram

Question 6 is a multiple-choice question in which the participants chose the answers they thought were suitable. The question is related to the language learning opportunities Instagram might offer for English learners. Questions 7-10 have been gathered into the same table (Table 6), as for each of them the participants answered on a Likert scale from 1=fully agree to 6=fully disagree. The most popular answer has been highlighted for clarity in both tables.

Table 5: Question 6 results

"On Instagram, you can learn":	n	%
Vocabulary	**26**	**89,7%**
Grammar or language structures	10	34,5%
Writing	16	55,2%
Reading comprehension	24	82,8%
Listening comprehension	23	79,3%
None of these	0	0,0%

The most frequently chosen answer for Question 6 was vocabulary which gathered 26 (89,7%) answers. Most of the respondents think that Instagram could offer some suitable grounds for learning new words. The second and third most common answers were reading comprehension with 24 (82,8%) responses and listening comprehension with 23 (79,3%) responses. Some respondents also found that Instagram could help with writing, accounting for 16 (55,2%) answers, and grammar or language structures which received 10 (34,5%) answers. None of the respondents think that Instagram is not suitable for any of these learning categories.

These results correlate with Question 5, as many of the respondents have learned vocabulary from Instagram. Learning listening and reading comprehension were also mentioned along with grammar. None of the respondents had specifically mentioned writing, but the majority

uses English often while communicating on Instagram. In conclusion, English students think that Instagram offers many language learning opportunities for language learners.

Table 6: Questions 7-10 results

	Fully agree	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly dis-agree	Strongly disagree	Fully disa-gree
7. Instagram offers a natural platform for language learn-ing	10,4%	24,1%	**48,8%**	10,3%	6,9%	0,0%
8. It is easy to com-municate with oth-ers on Instagram in English	**48,3%**	37,9%	13,8%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
9. Instagram is a motivating platform for language learn-ing	13,8%	**41,4%**	17,2%	13,8%	10,3%	3,5%
10. Instagram can help with language anxiety regarding the use of English	13,8%	**37,9%**	24,1%	20,7%	3,5%	0,0%

Table 6 displays answers to Questions 7-10. Approximately half of the respondents slightly agree that Instagram offers a natural platform for language learning. The results were mostly positive with some disagreements. Question 8 gathered only positive answers with every re-spondent agreeing that it is easy to communicate with others on Instagram. The motivational aspect of the platform gathered different opinions with most respondents slightly agreeing, but some disagreeing. Lastly, the question regarding language anxiety also got different responses, ranging from most of the respondents agreeing, to some disagreeing with the statement. Overall, the results suggest that English students have mostly positive attitudes towards Instagram as a language learning tool.

The last question of the survey was an open-ended question: "What kind of disadvantages can Instagram pose for language learning?" which focused on the perceived harms that Instagram might pose for language learning. The majority of the respondents thought that the language used in Instagram is not formal, does not follow grammar rules, and may contain grammatical errors. Some respondents also mentioned the use of abbreviations and uncapitalized words. All of these could make it possible for language learners to learn wrong forms of language, such as:

Example 4.

Kieli on arkista, jolloin voi altistua kielioppivirheille esim. sanastossa tai kieliopissa (esim. yleisin virhe sanoissa your ja you're)
The language is informal, so one can get exposed to grammatical errors, for example, with vocabulary or grammar (e.g. the most common mistake in words your and you're)

One respondent thought that the informal nature of the platform is not harmful for those who are able to differentiate between formal and informal language, but new language learners might learn wrong forms of language. The respondent continued that Instagram may not be a good or suitable place to start a language learning journey. Additionally, the differences between formal classroom instruction and informal language learning might be confusing for language learners.

However, many respondents found some advantages within the disadvantages that the platform might have:

Example 5.

Haittana voisi olla slangin käyttö tai epäasiallinen kielen käyttö. Tämä kuitenkin on positiivinen asia, koska vapaa-ajan elämässä useat puhuvat slangin avulla.
One of the disadvantages could be the use of slang, or the use of inappropriate language. However, this is a positive thing because many use slang in their spare time.

Many of the respondents mentioned that even though the language within the platform is mostly informal and grammatically incorrect, it offers an authentic environment for learning how people communicate. Another respondent mentioned that Instagram is a good platform

for learning slang and informal language. Some respondents did not find many disadvantages, and one mentioned that language learners might learn different accents, dialects, and slang which is beneficial for language acquisition.

5   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to explore the experiences and attitudes of English students regarding the use of Instagram as a tool for language learning purposes. The research questions aimed to find out the students' experiences, attitudes, and perceived benefits and harms of using Instagram as a language learning tool.

The results suggest that most English students in this study consume mostly English content on Instagram. The respondents also use English often while communicating with others on the platform. When it comes to language learning content, most English students do not come across this type of content frequently. The respondents might not need this type of content which is why it does not show up on their feeds, whereas an active language learner might get this type of content suggested to them more often. Additionally, approximately half of the respondents felt that Instagram has been an important language learning tool for them, whereas half disagreed with the statement. These results may depend on the way that the respondents use the platform. Those who consume content may have learned English differently than those who have actively used it with others.

The present study suggests that English students have mostly positive attitudes towards Instagram as a learning tool, even though it might pose some challenges for new learners. Most respondents think that Instagram offers opportunities for learning listening and reading comprehension and vocabulary. Additionally, it offers a natural platform for language learning, and it is easy to communicate with others on the platform. Most respondents think that Instagram is a motivating platform for language learning, but some disagree. Possible explanation for this might be the type of informal language used within the app, and people picking on comments and posts with grammar mistakes. Additionally, most respondents think that Instagram could help language learners deal with anxiety related to using English. However, the platform might

be harmful for new language learners since the language is mostly informal, which could lead to learning wrong grammar or sentence formats.

The results of the present study are similar to El Kamili's (2023), Lailiyah's and Setiyaningsih's (2020) and Gonulal's (2019) studies which all indicated that language learners had positive attitudes towards Instagram as a language learning tool. However, the respondents in El Kamili's (2023) study found that Instagram is a natural and encouraging place for practicing English, but some of the respondents in the present study disagreed with the claim that Instagram offers a natural platform for language learning. Gonulal's (2019) study observed the motivational aspect of the platform, and the participants thought that Instagram is a motivating and an interesting way to learn a language. Most of the participants in the present study found Instagram to be a motivating platform for language learning with a few respondents disagreeing. Overall, the respondents in the present study were more critical towards Instagram as a language learning tool, whereas the previous studies demonstrated more positive attitudes. Additionally, the previous research on MALL has some correlation with the results of the present study. Cho et al. (2018, p. 18) claim that MALL can aid with communication, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, the respondents in the present study did not find Instagram to be appropriate for learning grammatical structures, spelling, and punctuation (Cho et al., 2018, p. 18).

The present study explored English students' experiences and attitudes of Instagram as a language learning tool. The study will benefit language learners and students who are interested in informal learning and want to practice their language skills in a natural setting. The study will also benefit educators and parents on the benefits of social media, and hopefully encourage them to use mobile devices for teaching purposes.

However, the present study has some limitations. The survey gathered responses from students of one university in Finland, so the results cannot be generalized. Additionally, the study analyzed responses from only 29 respondents. Lastly, the respondents were English students, indicating that the results may not be applicable to students who study other languages or major in different fields of study.

Further research on this topic could utilize more qualitative approaches since many studies have used mixed methods. Researchers could also compare Instagram to other social media

platforms or social media applications specifically dedicated to language learning and observe different learning outcomes. Researchers could also conduct a longitudinal study and determine if Instagram could have major language learning benefits after using it specifically for language learning.

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APPENDIX

Kokemukset

Seuraavat kysymykset tai väittämät liittyvät kokemuksiisi englannin kielen käytöstä ja oppimisesta Instagramissa.

Kysymyksiin tai väittämiin vastataan joko asteikolla 1-5 (1= aina, 5= en koskaan) tai asteikolla 1-6 (1= täysin samaa mieltä, 6= täysin eri mieltä)

1. Kuinka usein käytät englantia kommunikoidessasi Instagramissa? (Esimerkiksi tarinajulkaisut, yksityiset keskustelut, kommentit jne.)

1. Aina

2. Usein

3. Silloin tällöin

4. Harvoin

5. En koskaan

2. Kuinka usein törmäät englannin oppimiseen suunnattuun sisältöön? (Esimerkiksi ääntämisharjoitukset, sanastoon tai kielioppiin liittyvät julkaisut)

1. Aina

2. Usein

3. Silloin tällöin

4. Harvoin

5. En koskaan

3. Lähes kaikki Instagramissa seuraamani sisällöntuottajat tai brändit tuottavat sisältöä englanniksi.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

4. Instagram on ollut minulle merkittävä väline englannin oppimisessa.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

5. Millä tavoin olet oppinut englantia Instagramissa? Voit vastata englanniksi tai suomeksi.
[Avoin]

Mielipiteet

Seuraavat väittämät liittyvät mielipiteisiisi englannin kielen oppimisesta Instagramissa.
Kohdassa 6 valitaan mielestäsi parhaiten sopivat vaihtoehdot ja väittämissä 7-10 vastataan as-
teikolla 1-6 (1= täysin samaa mieltä, 6= täysin eri mieltä)

6. Valitse mielestäsi sopivat vaihtoehdot.
Instagramin avulla voi oppia sanastoa
Instagramin avulla voi oppia kielioppia tai kielen rakenteita
Instagramissa voi saada harjoitusta kirjoittamiseen
Instagramissa voi saada harjoitusta luetun ymmärtämiseen
Instagramissa voi saada harjoitusta kuullun ymmärtämiseen
Instagramissa ei voi saada harjoitusta mihinkään näistä

7. Instagram tarjoaa luontevan alustan kielenoppimiselle.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

8. Instagramissa on helppo kommunikoida muiden kanssa englanniksi.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

9. Instagram on motivoiva alusta kielenoppimiselle.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

10. Instagramin avulla voi päästä yli englannin kielen käyttöön liittyvästä jännityksestä.

1. Täysin samaa mieltä

2. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3. Hiukan samaa mieltä

4. Hiukan eri mieltä

5. Jokseenkin eri mieltä

6. Täysin eri mieltä

11. Mitä haittoja Instagramin käytöllä voi olla kielenoppimisen kannalta? Voit vastata englanniksi tai suomeksi.

[Avoin]