



Perceptions of Using Instagram as a tool to Improve Speaking Skills: A Study of Saudi EFL University Students

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Received: 23 December 2025 | Received: in revised form 23 February 2026 | Accepted 30 March 2026

APA Citation:

Khadawardi, H. A, Noorwali, S. M. (2026). Perceptions of Using Instagram on Learning Expressions to Improve Speaking in English as a Foreign Language: A Study of Saudi EFL University Students. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), 50-63.
Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.12105>

Abstract

This study investigates EFL students' perceptions of Instagram application as a tool for learning English expressions to enhance English speaking skills. The study aims to examine its pedagogical potential in the Saudi context, particularly in relation to speaking proficiency. Employing a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 112 female undergraduate students enrolled in the preparatory program at King Abdulaziz University. A web-based questionnaire, adapted from validated instruments, was used to measure students' perceptions of Instagram's general benefits for language learning and its effectiveness in teaching expressions. The findings revealed that students strongly valued Instagram for improving multiple language skills, with particular emphasis on vocabulary enrichment, pronunciation, and communicative competence. They reported feeling motivated, comfortable, and less anxious when engaging with Instagram-based expression posts. Correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between students' perceptions of Instagram's overall benefits and their perceptions of its effectiveness in enhancing speaking ($r = .815$, $p < .01$). The study contributes context-specific evidence to the literature on technology-mediated learning, supporting both the Technology-Mediated Learning Theory and the Lexical Approach. Pedagogically, the results suggest that Instagram can be integrated as a supplementary tool to foster engagement, promote fluency, and align classroom instruction with students' digital practices.

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Keywords: Instagram, EFL learners; Speaking Skills; English Expressions; Technology-Mediated Learning; Students' Perceptions.

Introduction

English has assumed an increasingly central role as a global lingua franca, positioning speaking proficiency as a key outcome of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Communicative competence in spoken English is essential for academic participation, professional communication, and global mobility. Consequently, EFL curricula worldwide emphasize the development of speaking skills alongside other language domains. However, research consistently indicates that speaking remains one of the most

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.12105>

challenging skills for EFL learners to acquire, particularly in instructional contexts where exposure to authentic language use is limited.

In the Saudi Arabian context, English is taught as a foreign language across all levels of education, yet learners often demonstrate limited oral proficiency despite years of formal instruction. Previous studies have reported that Saudi EFL students frequently struggle with pronunciation, lexical retrieval, and spontaneous speech production, resulting in hesitation and avoidance of oral participation (Ahmad & Nazim, 2014). These difficulties have been attributed to a range of interrelated factors, including teacher-centred pedagogical practices, limited opportunities for meaningful interaction, an overemphasis on accuracy and examination outcomes, and affective barriers such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes (Al-Saraj, 2014; Alrabai, 2015).

From a pedagogical perspective, vocabulary knowledge and the ability to use formulaic expressions play a crucial role in spoken fluency and communicative effectiveness. The Lexical Approach emphasizes that fluent speech depends not only on grammatical competence but also on learners' access to prefabricated lexical chunks and expressions that facilitate real-time communication. Nevertheless, traditional classroom instruction often prioritizes isolated vocabulary items and grammatical structures, providing insufficient exposure to the kinds of formulaic language needed for spontaneous speaking.

Advances in digital technology and the widespread use of mobile devices have created new opportunities for extending language learning beyond the classroom. Social media platforms, in particular, offer informal learning environments where learners can encounter authentic language input, engage in repeated exposure, and interact with content at their own pace. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram have attracted increasing attention in EFL research due to their potential to support learner engagement, autonomy, and motivation (Erarslan, 2019).

Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as especially popular among university-aged learners. Its multimodal features—combining images, short videos, captions, and audio—allow for concise and visually supported language input, which can be particularly effective for presenting vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation models. As a result, Instagram has increasingly been adopted by language educators to share short expression-based lessons and speaking-related content (Aloraini, 2018). Despite this growing pedagogical interest, empirical research examining Instagram's role in supporting speaking development remains limited, especially in EFL contexts where English exposure is largely restricted to formal educational settings.

Together, these considerations highlight the need for systematic investigation into how social media platforms, and Instagram in particular, may contribute to speaking development through expression-focused input. Establishing a clearer understanding of learners' perceptions in specific educational contexts is a necessary step toward evaluating the pedagogical value of such tools and informing evidence-based instructional practices.

Rationale for the Study

Recent advances in technology offer potential solutions, particularly through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. These tools provide learners with authentic, interactive environments that can foster motivation, facilitate language acquisition, and support fluency development (Erarslan, 2019). Instagram, in particular, has emerged as a popular medium among young adults, with increasing numbers of educators using it to deliver language-learning content, especially vocabulary and expressions (Aloraini, 2018).

The literature on social media integration in EFL learning has expanded significantly, yet much of it remains descriptive, focusing on general attitudes rather than critically examining pedagogical outcomes. Studies such as Al-Said et al. (2020) have shown that platforms like Instagram and Facebook can enhance motivation and learner engagement, but they often overlook deeper issues such as the sustainability of learning gains, the quality of language produced, and the risk of distraction inherent in social media environments.

Research Gaps

Despite growing interest in social media-assisted language learning, existing research has primarily focused on learners' general attitudes and motivation, with limited attention to language-specific outcomes. In particular, there is a lack of empirical research examining the role of Instagram in learning English expressions and its perceived contribution to speaking development. Moreover, most previous studies have been conducted in non-Saudi contexts, limiting the transferability of findings to Saudi EFL classrooms. This gap underscores the need for context-specific research that investigates both pedagogical relevance and learner perceptions. A critical gap in prior research is the lack of attention to language-specific outcomes—particularly in relation to vocabulary and idiomatic expression learning, which are crucial for communicative competence. While earlier studies highlight positive perceptions, few provide empirical evidence of measurable improvement in linguistic performance. This limitation has been noted in recent reviews (e.g.,

(Zourou, 2020)), which call for moving beyond attitudinal surveys toward mixed methods approaches that capture both perception and performance.

Another overlooked dimension is the role of learning agency and autonomy. Research suggests that while social media fosters collaborative learning, it may also reinforce surface-level engagement unless learners are guided with structured tasks (Reinhardt, 2019). Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a dearth of region-specific investigations in Arab and Saudi EFL classrooms. This lack of contextualization raises questions about the transferability of findings and underscores the need for studies tailored to local educational realities.

Despite its popularity, empirical research examining Instagram's pedagogical value in EFL learning remains limited, particularly in relation to speaking skills. Existing studies have largely focused on learners' general attitudes, motivation, or engagement when using social media, often reporting positive perceptions (e.g., (Al-Said et al., 2022)). However, fewer studies have examined language-specific outcomes, such as the learning of expressions and their perceived contribution to speaking competence. Moreover, much of the available research has been conducted outside the Saudi context, raising concerns about the applicability of findings to local educational settings characterized by distinct cultural, institutional, and instructional constraints.

Purpose of the Study and Research Objectives

In response to these gaps, the present study investigates Saudi EFL students' perceptions of Instagram as a tool for learning English expressions and enhancing speaking skills. Specifically, it examines students' perceptions of Instagram's general benefits for language learning, their views on the effectiveness of Instagram-based expression tutorials for speaking development, and the relationship between these two perceptions. Given the limited research conducted within the Saudi context on Instagram's role in developing speaking skills, this study investigates the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of Instagram's benefits as an English language learning tool?
2. What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Instagram expression tutorials in improving speaking skills?
3. Is there a significant correlation between students' perceptions of Instagram's general benefits and its effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills?

By focusing on a Saudi university preparatory program, this study provides context-specific evidence that addresses an under-researched area and responds to calls for more pedagogically grounded investigations of technology-enhanced language learning. The findings aim to inform both research and instructional practice by clarifying the perceived role of Instagram in supporting speaking development within the Saudi EFL context.

By addressing these objectives, the study provides context-specific evidence on the pedagogical potential of Instagram in Saudi EFL settings and contributes to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language learning.

Literature Review

Technology-Mediated Theory

Technology-mediated language use and learning is a second language acquisition theoretical framework that imposes innovative and pedagogical research about social media's effectiveness and outcomes on language learning (Thorne & Smith, 2011). It simply indicates that technology is the means of interaction between students and teachers to convey information (Bower, 2019). This theory is historically referred to as Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) that imposes practical and innovative studies on the effectiveness of technology on language learning (Thorne & Smith, 2011). The results of the studies conducted on mobile applications and language learning lead to the emergence of Mobile-assisted Language learning (MALL).

Researchers define MALL as "The use of mobile technology in language learning" (Bahrani, 2011) clarified that the rapid development of mobile devices enables learners to learn English at ease without having to attend English classes. He also stated, "Mobile phone-based language learning technology, thanks to its portability, low production cost, versatile features, and significant memory space has the outstanding potential to provide everybody with authentic audio/visual language learning materials that could possibly teach them to speak and read (p. 247)". Based on this theory, the Instagram application has many features that enable its users to communicate openly by sharing audio/visual content. Students could encounter many educational accounts that promote English learning. By watching, sharing, commenting, listening, and reading, students could acquire the language both explicitly and implicitly. Accordingly, it was vital for this

research author to dedicate some efforts to investigating its efficiency as an English language learning tool in general and as a speaking enhancement in particular from the EFL students' point of view.

The Importance of Teaching Expressions

Another significant aspect is the lexical approach. It is based on structuralism theory which views languages as multi-word units that convey meanings. Multi-word lexical units play a fundamental role in learning and communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In contrast to Chomsky's influential theory of language which claim that speakers produced and create novel sentences that have never been heard before, the lexical approach views spoken sentences as memorized patterns from a high proportion of everyday conversations. Expressions "chunks" play a key role in second language learning. As cited in (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), Nattinger (1980) commented: "language production consists of piecing together the ready-made units appropriate for a particular situation and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations. Our teaching, therefore, would center on these patterns and the ways they can be pieced together, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur."

Furthermore, speaking competence covers two areas, fluency and accuracy. According to Mazouzi (2013), both fluency and accuracy are vital factors for effective communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Fluency in speaking is the ultimate goal for many English learners; it is defined as being able to speak easily and quickly. To gain fluency, second-language learners need to acquire and understand English expressions (Barker & Sorhus, 1975). One research stated that native speakers use them once in every five words. For instance, they use them while arranging their thoughts and preparing their arguments or answering a question in an oral exchange (Barker & Sorhus, 1975). On the other hand, accuracy means paying special attention to the correctness and completeness of the forms such as grammatical structure and vocabulary while speaking (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

However, the production of ready-made units does not require effort for formulating and decomposing their components (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2022). Considering this, Richards & Rodgers, 2014 claims that various factors can affect speech's naturalness, highlighting the importance of learners' use of conversational routines, expressions, and what is frequently referred to as multi-word chunks (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018). Thus, in the current research, learning expressions through Instagram could positively affect students' fluency and accuracy which are considered fundamental components to build language production.

Speaking Skills Improvement and Challenges

On the other hand, English speaking is not an easy task for most second-language learners (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). It is defined as the process of interaction to convey meanings that involve producing, receiving, and processing information (Florez, 1999). Speaking is a skill that deserves consideration for language learners as the main aim of teaching English as a second language is to enable students to communicate via the English language correctly and effectively (Florez, 1999). Teaching speaking involves teaching learners how to select words and sentences according to appropriate settings and how to speak quickly and confidently (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014).

Despite the importance of acquiring and improving this skill, it has been overlooked by pupils and instructors for many reasons, such as focusing on grammatical structure, reading, and writing and lack of oral skills testing (Florez, 1999). However, the use of technology can encourage learners to be fun and immerse them in a range of situations. With the use of technology, students can take on self-directed tasks, participate in self-paced interactions, maintain their privacy, and work in a secure setting where mistakes can be fixed and detailed feedback can be offered (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted on speaking skills improvement, challenges, and teaching and learning. For instance, a study conducted by Ali and Kham (2010) to investigate college students' perspectives on improving speaking proficiency in Pakistan. The results showed students' dissatisfaction with learning English as a subject, not a language. They were not given chance to practice speaking in classrooms while their teachers did not speak English most of the time (Ibid). Other researchers (Elhassan & Adam, 2017) conducted experimental studies to examine the effect of interventions on students' speaking performance. Self-recorded videos, dialogic teaching, digital storytelling, and collaborative learning are the interventions that significantly impacted students speaking skills. According to these researchers, pupils were motivated, engaging, gained self-confidence, and they outperformed the control groups in fluency, coherence, and content. In the Saudi context, according to Younes and Albalawi (2016), elements that influence students' speaking abilities include conceptual knowledge, a lack of motivation and confidence, teachers' comments, anxiety, mother tongue interference, the amount of time allocated for student engagement, poor input, and unclear directions. Therefore, speaking is considered a challenging skill for many language learners. For language tutors and curriculum designers to improve students' oral skills, this research shed some light on students' perspectives and attitudes on the effectiveness of Instagram posts in improving speaking.

Social Media and Language Learning

Social media and language learning have been the subject of many researchers investigating the impact of mobile communicative applications on English language learning. Most social media platforms are free to download, easy to use, and only need email registration to start using them. Due to their openness, interaction, and sociability, social media platforms are recognized as effective instruments for teaching and learning processes (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). These applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide authentic content for the learners, enhancing the learning process and making learners confident, motivated, and willing to communicate (Badri et al., 2017). These platforms create enjoyable and less stressful learning environments to foster students' learning opportunities (Reinders & Benson, 2017). Beatty (2017) categorized social media in education as “edutainment” since learners use it for education and entertainment objectives. Additionally, according to Kessler (2013), social media is massive linguistics corpora that offer dense, authentic interaction opportunities for learners to improve their language skills. The mixed-methods study by Ningrum and Apoko (2025) found that social media use positively contributed to vocabulary, speaking skills, and motivation among Indonesian secondary students,

Social media platforms have many advantages for language learning. For instance, Facebook has characteristics that enhance commitment to educational activities, involvement, collaboration, peer support, and communication skills with classmates and teachers (Aydin, 2017). It provides opportunities to build all English language skills through engagement in language tasks with pre-planned objectives (Aydin, 2012). Furthermore, Twitter with its microblogging features offer interaction with native speakers and contains various context and tasks for different language levels (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016). Twitter provides authentic material that promotes L2 socio-pragmatic and cultural awareness which are part of building foreign language skills (Blattner & Daloia, 2018). Thus, Twitter increases the autonomy of language learners (Erarslan, 2019). Borau et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study to investigate how Twitter was applied in an English foreign language classroom. They concluded that most of the students interacted on Twitter and confirmed the suitability of Twitter as an English communicative improvement tool.

Moreover, Soviyah and Etikaningsih (2018) conducted an empirical study on Instagram for developing descriptive writing skills. The data were collected through pre and post-tests after using Instagram on the experimental group. They concluded that Instagram significantly enhanced students' writing abilities contrary to the control group. These studies indicate that social media platforms had proven their capabilities as English language learning tools. While many Saudi students utilize them for learning purposes (Aloraini, 2018), a large proportion of Saudis aged between 18-25 have Instagram accounts. Thus, this research could be beneficial as the author created an English learning account on Instagram to promote the learning process and to find out university students' perceptions of using it to build and improve their English speaking by learning various types of expressions.

Instagram and Language Learning

Instagram is one of the most popular social media applications. It is defined as a site for uploading and sharing photos, and videos with captions and comments underneath them (Al-Garawi, 2016; Aloraini, 2018). It is a motivational teaching English tool that significantly impacts students' interactions. When using Instagram to learn English, students exhibit a variety of interests. For instance, pupils favor using it to understand straightforward topics as opposed to difficult ones and vocabulary over grammar (AlGhamdi, 2018). Also, Instagram could employ a wide range of activities. According to Erarslan (2019), a variety of language classroom activities, such as digital storytelling, grammar exercises through images, role plays, reading, and speaking exercises through videos, etc. can be used.

Many studies have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of Instagram as an English learning tool. Al-Ali (2014) conducted a study on intermediate school students to integrate Instagram as a language learning tool. Students were asked to complete writing and speaking tasks to reinforce vocabulary, grammar, writing, and speaking. The study concluded that the students were motivated and creative in accomplishing the assigned tasks due to Instagram's popularity among the students.

In the Saudi context, Al-Garawi (2016), conducted a mixed-method study to investigate the benefits and the barriers of using Instagram in learning English. The findings of the study revealed many advantages such as enhancing vocabulary, improving oral communication skills, boosting reading, writing, and listening abilities, as well as fostering a sense of time and place freedom. While the challenges were: the cost of Internet access, the difficulty of writing lengthy paragraphs, the lack of direction from the syllabuses, the lack of support from the teachers, shame, and the absence of immediate feedback. Al-Garawi (2016) adopted a random sampling technique without applying an intervention to them. Additionally, In Indonesia, Afifah and Devana (2020) conducted a quasi-experiment study to find out the effect of Instagram video speaking tasks on students' oral skills and motivation. The results showed there were positive improvements in students' speaking performance and attitudes.

Taken together, the literature reveals two key gaps: (1) limited empirical evidence of social media's impact on speaking performance, particularly in relation to expressions, and (2) a lack of context-specific research within Saudi Arabia, where cultural and institutional factors may influence both learners' perceptions and practices. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates Saudi EFL students' perceptions of Instagram as a tool for learning expressions to enhance speaking skills. By linking Technology-Mediated Learning Theory with the Lexical Approach, the study contributes a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant analysis to the growing field of technology-enhanced language learning.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to explore Saudi EFL students' perceptions of Instagram as an English language learning tool, particularly its effectiveness in learning expressions to enhance speaking skills, and to examine the relationship between these two variables. A quantitative approach was adopted using a web-based survey. According to [Creswell and Creswell \(2017\)](#), survey research provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population through the study of a sample. Its findings offer generalizability within defined parameters and allow researchers to draw statistically reliable conclusions ([Lodico et al., 2006](#)).

Sampling and Context

The study was conducted at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. The target population included all female undergraduate students enrolled in the preparatory program. Using simple random sampling, 112 students were selected, ensuring equal opportunity for participation and reducing sampling bias. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 and shared relatively homogenous linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which increased internal validity but may limit generalizability beyond the ELI context.

Research Procedure

Data was collected through a structured Google Forms questionnaire consisting of two sections adapted from prior studies. The first section ([Al-Garawi, 2016](#)) measured perceptions of Instagram's benefits for English learning, while the second ([Erarslan, 2019](#)) assessed perceptions of Instagram's effectiveness in teaching expressions to improve speaking. Minor modifications were made for contextual fit (e.g., replacing "practice speaking" with "learn to speak"). Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) and translated into Arabic for clarity.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by the thesis supervisor and five TESOL postgraduate students, whose feedback informed minor revisions for clarity and contextual appropriateness. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.73, indicating acceptable internal consistency ([Lodico et al., 2006](#)).

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving ethical approval from the ELI Ethics Committee at King Abdulaziz University, in the English Language Institute, data collection followed a two-stage process. First, participants engaged with the researcher's dedicated Instagram account (@English_with_Safaa), which featured over 100 expression-based posts including idioms, collocations, and phrasal verbs. Each post contained a short, contextualized video with English subtitles and Arabic translation. Second, the questionnaire link was distributed digitally via AirDrop and institutional communication channels. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26) in three stages. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were calculated to summarize students' perceptions of Instagram's benefits for English learning and the effectiveness of expression tutorials for improving speaking skills. This provided an overview of central tendencies and variability in responses. Second, the questionnaire items were organized into two scales:

1. Perceptions of Instagram's general benefits for English language learning.
2. Perceptions of the effectiveness of Instagram expression posts in enhancing speaking.

Each scale was treated as a separate variable in SPSS. To ensure consistency in interpretation, Likert-scale responses were coded numerically as follows: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5. Lower mean values therefore indicated stronger agreement, while higher mean values

reflected stronger disagreement. Finally, to address the third research question, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the two scales. This test was selected for its suitability in measuring the strength and direction of associations between continuous variables. A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted to determine statistical significance.

Results

Students' Perceptions of Instagram's General Benefits

Descriptive statistics indicated that students held overall positive perceptions of Instagram as a language learning tool. Mean scores for all 14 items were below 3.00, reflecting agreement across the scale. The strongest endorsements were for Instagram's role in improving listening skills ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .72$) and pronunciation ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .70$), suggesting students perceived clear benefits for oral-aural competencies. Similarly, students valued Instagram for providing an enjoyable learning experience ($M = 1.52$, $SD = .68$) and enhancing reading skills ($M = 1.52$, $SD = .68$).

Although still positive, the lowest levels of endorsement were observed for interaction with instructors ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.07$) and improvement in writing skills ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .99$), suggesting Instagram may be less effective for formal academic writing or teacher-student interaction. Overall, as shown in Table 1, students recognized Instagram as an effective means of increasing motivation, autonomy, and communication skills.

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of Instagram's Benefits for English Learning (N = 112)

No.	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Instagram encourages me to interact with my instructors.	2.01	1.070
2.	Instagram encourages me to interact with students.	1.67	.842
3.	Instagram provides me with a new enjoyable learning experience	1.52	.684
4.	Using Instagram English language activities improves my oral communication skills.	1.62	.808
5.	Using Instagram English language activities improves my written communication skills	2.04	.999
6.	Using Instagram English language activities improves my listening skills.	1.45	.721
7.	Using Instagram English language activities improves my reading skills.	1.52	.684
8.	Instagram pronunciation activities have improved my pronunciation.	1.45	.697
9.	I feel that Instagram vocabulary activities have enriched my vocabulary.	1.57	.744
10.	I can better construct correct sentences after using Instagram grammar activities.	1.71	.934
11.	My motivation to learn English has been enhanced after using Instagram English language activities.	1.74	.878
12.	I think Instagram encourages independent learning.	1.57	.831
13.	Learning English via Instagram saves my time and effort.	1.77	.859
14.	I like to learn English via Instagram because I enjoy a sense of freedom of time and place.	1.56	.695

Note. Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower means indicate stronger agreement.

Students' Perceptions of Instagram Expression Tutorials for Speaking

Analysis of the second scale revealed strong agreement on Instagram's effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills (see Table 2).

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of Instagram Expression Tutorials for Improving Speaking (N = 112)

No.	Statements	M	SD
1.	I feel comfortable using Instagram for learning English speaking.	1.71	.832
2.	Using Instagram for learning English expressions promotes my motivation in learning English.	1.63	.818
3.	Instagram could be an effective way for me to learn my English-speaking skills comfortably.	1.69	.881
4.	I feel no pressure when I learn English expressions and make mistakes on Instagram.	1.63	.796
5.	I believe using Instagram helps me learn how to speak English better.	1.70	.837
6.	Using Instagram offers a new way for me to learn English speaking.	1.62	.819
7.	I feel good when I learn how to speak English on Instagram.	1.71	.832

Note. Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower means indicate stronger agreement.

Mean values ranged narrowly between 1.62 and 1.71, indicating consistent positive perceptions. The strongest endorsement was for Instagram providing a "new way of learning speaking" ($M = 1.62$), followed by "increased motivation" and "reduced pressure when making mistakes" ($M = 1.63$ each). Students also agreed that Instagram created a comfortable environment for learning speaking skills.

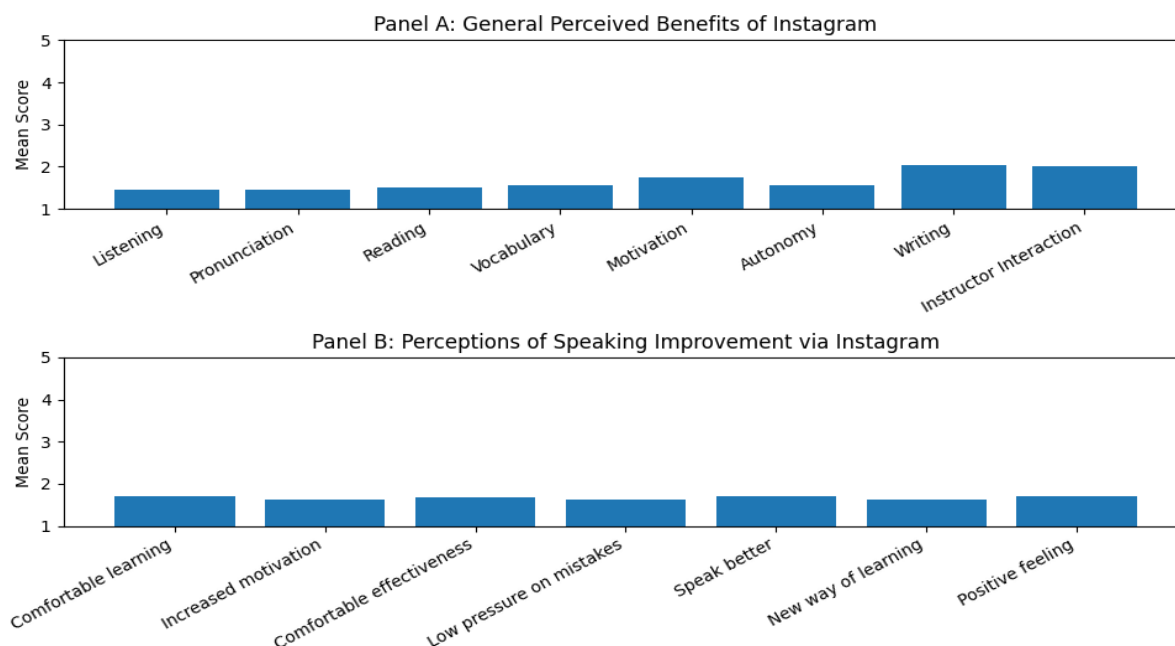


Figure 1: Students' perceptions of Instagram for English language learning and speaking improvement (N = 112)

Taken together, the findings depicted in Figure 1 indicate that students' favorable perceptions of Instagram extend beyond isolated skill gains to encompass broader pedagogical benefits. As shown in Panel A, Instagram was perceived as particularly effective for developing oral-aural skills and fostering learner autonomy and motivation, while comparatively weaker endorsement was observed for writing and instructor interaction. Importantly, Panel B demonstrates that these general benefits translate into positive speaking-related outcomes, with students reporting increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and a comfortable environment for practicing spoken English. The strong association between overall perceived benefits and speaking improvement further suggests that Instagram's value lies not merely in content delivery but in its capacity to create supportive learning conditions that facilitate oral communication development. These patterns provide a foundation for the following discussion, which situates the results within research on technology-enhanced language learning, learner autonomy, and affective factors in speaking instruction.

Correlation Between Instagram's Benefits and Speaking Improvement

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the two scales (Table 3). Results revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = .815$, $p < .01$), demonstrating that students who perceived Instagram as beneficial for general English learning were also more likely to perceive it as effective for improving speaking through expression tutorials.

Table 3: Correlation Between Perceptions of Instagram's Benefits and Speaking Improvement (N = 112)

Variable		Instagram's Benefits	Learning English expressions to Improve Speaking via Instagram
Instagram's Benefits	Pearson Correlation	1	.815**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	112
Expression learning for speaking improvement	Pearson Correlation	.815**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	112	112

Note. $P < .01$ (2-tailed).

Students strongly endorsed Instagram as beneficial for developing multiple language skills, especially listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Expression-focused posts were perceived as effective in improving speaking, particularly by enhancing motivation and providing a low-pressure learning environment. A highly significant positive correlation was found between general benefits and speaking improvement, indicating that favorable perceptions of Instagram as a learning tool are closely tied to perceptions of its role in enhancing oral communication.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of Instagram as a language learning tool, with a focus on its role in teaching expressions to enhance speaking proficiency. The findings revealed overall positive attitudes, strong endorsement of expression-based posts, and a significant correlation between general benefits and speaking improvement. These outcomes provide several theoretical, pedagogical, and policy insights.

Students' Perceptions of Instagram's Benefits for English Language Learning

The results revealed that students generally perceived Instagram as a beneficial tool for developing multiple language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. High levels of agreement were reported regarding Instagram's capacity to enrich vocabulary, enhance pronunciation, and promote motivation. These findings align with [Bahrani \(2011\)](#) and [Chinnery \(2006\)](#), who argued that mobile technologies can provide authentic input that fosters both reading and speaking proficiency. They also support the technology-mediated learning theory ([Bower, 2019](#); [Thorne & Smith, 2011](#)), which suggests that digital platforms offer authentic opportunities for interaction and language acquisition. However, the comparatively lower endorsement of instructor interaction and writing development suggests that students may perceive Instagram as more effective for informal language practice than for structured academic communication, a pattern also observed in prior mobile learning studies. The study by [Teng et al. \(2022\)](#) found that Instagram feed-based tasks significantly enhanced EFL learners' grammar acquisition compared to traditional webinar instruction and that learners held positive attitudes toward using Instagram for language learning. This aligns with the present study's results showing that Instagram is perceived as supportive of language skill development, particularly in oral-aural and speaking domains, and valued for its motivational and autonomy-enhancing affordance.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate previous research highlighting Instagram's positive influence on learners' writing and grammar skills ([Al-Ali, 2014](#)). Students also valued the sense of flexibility and autonomy afforded by the platform, consistent with [Chinnery \(2006\)](#), who emphasized the portability and accessibility of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Taken together, these results indicate that Instagram not only engages students but also provides meaningful exposure to language that extends beyond the classroom.

Students' Perceptions of Learning Expressions to Improve EFL Speaking Skill

Students strongly agreed that Instagram expression tutorials were effective in enhancing their speaking skills. They reported feeling comfortable, motivated, and less anxious when engaging with Instagram-based expression posts. This supports earlier findings that social media promotes collaboration and motivation in language learning ([Dunn, 2013](#)). It also reinforces the lexical approach ([Richards & Rodgers, 2014](#)), which emphasizes the acquisition of multi-word units and expressions as key to developing fluency. Similar outcomes have been reported in empirical studies using mobile applications designed for speaking practice. For example, [Dorji \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that MALL interventions using the Cake application led to significant improvements in learners' speaking performance, while learners also reported increased confidence and satisfaction. Likewise, [Mykytiuk et al. \(2022\)](#) found that Facebook-mediated speaking tasks significantly enhanced vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse management. Although these studies employed experimental designs, their findings complement the present perception-based results by suggesting that positive learner experiences with mobile platforms may translate into measurable speaking gains when supported by structured tasks. The findings of [Dashti and Abdulsalam \(2025\)](#) closely align with the present study by demonstrating that regular use of social media applications positively influences second language learning, particularly in speaking, listening, and learner engagement. [Maierová \(2024\)](#) reported positive student perceptions of Instagram-based English for specific purposes tasks, highlighting high engagement, authenticity, and creativity. This aligns with the present study, which found that Instagram supports motivation and oral-aural skill development, particularly speaking, suggesting that pedagogically purposeful integration of Instagram can effectively enhance language learning. Together, these studies suggest that social media platforms support L2 learning primarily by providing frequent exposure to authentic language input.

Importantly, students perceived Instagram as a low-pressure environment for making mistakes and practicing expressions, which aligns with ([Bahrani, 2011](#)) assertion that mobile learning technologies can foster safe and supportive learning spaces. Moreover, students' enthusiasm in following accounts such as @English_with_Safaa suggests that integrating authentic digital resources can spark engagement and provide learners with formulaic expressions that improve their oral communication skills. Similar affective benefits were reported by [Arroyan and Ma'rufah \(2024\)](#), who found that learners using the Fondi mobile application perceived the platform as supportive and motivating for speaking practice. [Zalani and Yousofi \(2024\)](#) found that integrating Instagram into EFL instruction significantly enhanced learners' critical thinking skills compared to traditional classroom instruction, demonstrating Instagram's potential to support higher-order cognitive engagement in language learning. This complements the present study's findings that

students perceive Instagram as beneficial for developing oral–aural skills and motivation. However, these studies and the present research emphasize perceptions rather than direct performance outcomes, underscoring the need for cautious interpretation.

Correlation between Perceptions of Benefits and Speaking Improvement

The strong correlation ($r = .815$, $p < .01$) between general perceptions of Instagram's benefits and its perceived effectiveness in speaking development highlights the interdependence of learner attitudes and skill-specific outcomes. Learners who view Instagram as broadly beneficial are more likely to engage with it for targeted oral practice. This echoes Zarrinabadi (2014) finding that positive learner attitudes increase willingness to communicate in digital environments. At the same time, this relationship suggests that teachers and institutions should not only promote Instagram for speaking but also cultivate broader awareness of its educational potential across skills. While favorable perceptions may encourage greater engagement with expression content, it is also possible that learners who already feel confident about speaking are more inclined to evaluate Instagram positively. This limitation mirrors concerns raised in perception-based mobile learning studies (Arroyan & Ma'rufah, 2024) and reinforces calls for experimental and longitudinal research designs. Al-Nofaie (2020) similarly found that Saudi EFL students valued virtual learning via Blackboard for its flexibility and autonomy, though interactional limitations were noted. These findings align with the present study, which shows that Instagram supports learner autonomy and positive affective experiences, particularly in speaking practice.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Instagram has potential as a supplementary tool for expression learning and speaking development in Saudi EFL contexts, particularly when integrated with pedagogically guided tasks. Evidence from experimental MALL and social-media studies (Dorji, 2023; Mykytiuk et al., 2022) indicates that structured implementation is crucial for translating positive perceptions into actual performance gains. Phan (2025) found that English-major students perceived social media as beneficial for English language acquisition through increased exposure and engagement. This aligns with the present study, which shows that Instagram supports oral–aural development and motivation, suggesting that social media can enhance L2 learning when used with pedagogical guidance. Therefore, teachers should scaffold Instagram through clearly defined speaking objectives, guided interaction, and accountability mechanisms to minimize distraction and superficial engagement (Reinhardt, 2019).

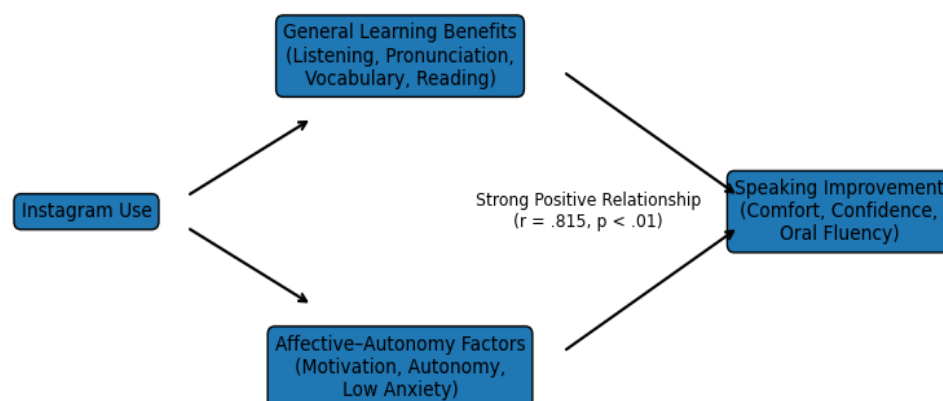


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Instagram Use and Speaking Development in EFL Contexts

As conceptualized in Figure 2, Instagram's contribution to speaking development appears to operate through two complementary mechanisms. First, students perceived Instagram as supporting foundational language skills—particularly listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading—which are closely linked to oral production. Second, Instagram fostered autonomy-related conditions, including increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and a sense of independent learning. The strong positive association between general perceived benefits and speaking improvement suggests that these mechanisms are not independent but mutually reinforcing. Rather than functioning solely as a content-delivery platform, Instagram appears to create a supportive learning ecology in which favorable affective conditions amplify opportunities for spoken language development.

Conclusion

This study investigated Saudi EFL students' perceptions of Instagram as a tool for English language learning and its effectiveness in teaching expressions to improve speaking skills. The findings revealed that students strongly value Instagram for its capacity to enhance multiple language skills, particularly speaking, through exposure to expressions in authentic contexts. They also reported higher levels of motivation, comfort, and engagement when interacting with Instagram-based learning materials. Importantly, the results

demonstrated a significant positive correlation between students' perceptions of Instagram's general benefits and their perceptions of its effectiveness in improving speaking. This suggests that favorable attitudes towards social media-assisted learning translate into greater acceptance of its potential for oral proficiency development.

These findings support technology-mediated language learning and the Lexical Approach, suggesting that Instagram can serve as an effective supplementary tool to promote engagement and speaking fluency in EFL contexts. The findings suggest that Instagram can be effectively integrated as a supplementary tool in EFL instruction to enhance learner engagement, reduce speaking anxiety, and support the development of lexical and communicative competence.

While the findings are based on self-reported perceptions and do not establish causal relationships, the study offers a theoretically grounded account of how social media platforms such as Instagram may support speaking development in EFL contexts. By articulating a model that integrates effective, autonomy-related, and pedagogical dimensions, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on technology-enhanced language learning and provides a foundation for future experimental and longitudinal studies examining the impact of Instagram-mediated instruction on actual speaking performance.

Practically, Instagram can be effectively integrated as a supplementary tool in EFL instruction to enhance learner engagement, reduce speaking anxiety, and support the development of lexical and communicative competence. For practitioners, incorporating short, expression-focused content may help align classroom instruction with students' digital practices. From a research perspective, this study provides context-specific evidence from the Saudi EFL setting and highlights the need for future experimental and longitudinal research to examine the impact of social media-based instruction on actual speaking performance and instructional effectiveness.

For teachers, the findings suggest that Instagram can be effectively integrated as a supplementary tool to reinforce speaking instruction. Expression-focused posts can be curated and used in classroom activities such as role plays, reflection tasks, or peer discussions. Importantly, teachers should scaffold learners' use of Instagram by guiding them toward educational accounts and designing purposeful tasks that avoid the distractions often associated with social media (Reinhardt, 2019). For curriculum designers, embedding digital literacy and autonomous learning strategies within EFL programs could help students harness Instagram's features more strategically. Learners' preference for flexible, low-pressure environments aligns with recent calls for learner-centered pedagogy that bridges formal classroom instruction with everyday digital practices.

At the policy level, the results align with Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes digital transformation and innovation in education. Policymakers should consider supporting teachers through professional development on social media integration and providing institutional guidelines for safe and purposeful use. Moreover, digital self-learning centers, equipped with social media-based resources, could help normalize the use of platforms like Instagram in higher education. Issues of access and equity must also be addressed to ensure that all learners benefit equally from such innovations.

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by providing context-specific evidence from Saudi EFL learners, addressing a gap in prior research that has often been dominated by Western contexts. It also highlights the pedagogical potential of Instagram in bridging formal language learning with students' everyday digital practices. This study contributes to the growing literature on technology-mediated language learning by providing empirical evidence from a Saudi EFL context. It demonstrates how Instagram supports both the Technology-Mediated Learning Theory Thorne and Smith (2011) and the Lexical Approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), showing that authentic, mobile-based learning environments can facilitate both motivation and the acquisition of multi-word units essential for communicative competence.

This study has several limitations. Due to time constraints, the students were exposed to English expressions learning posts via Instagram for a limited time. Second, the study did not examine the real impact of learning expressions via Instagram on students' speaking progress. Also, piloting to measure the questionnaire's reliability could not be conducted because of time constraints. Further investigation should be implemented by a quasi-experiment with pre- and post-tests which would maintain better results for this research.

While this study provides valuable insights, its reliance on self-reported perceptions and its restriction to female learners in one context highlight the need for further investigation. Future studies should employ experimental or longitudinal designs to measure actual speaking outcomes, expand to diverse educational settings, and integrate both learner and teacher perspectives. Exploring the role of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven learning tools, alongside Instagram could also provide a richer understanding of how digital platforms reshape EFL pedagogy.

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