



Enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension through Instagram: A quasi-experimental study

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The rapid development of digital technology has reshaped students' learning preferences, particularly in accessing reading materials. Despite the abundance of digital resources, many students still struggle to develop sufficient English reading skills, indicating a need for innovative media that align with their learning habits. While several studies have investigated social media as a supplementary learning tool, limited research has specifically examined the systematic use of Instagram in enhancing students' reading comprehension. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the implementation of Instagram as a learning medium to improve students' reading skills and to measure its effectiveness in classroom practice. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 28 university students, who were taught with Instagram-based reading materials. Reading materials were selected from authentic Instagram posts and delivered during eight instructional sessions over eight weeks. Data were collected through validated and reliable reading comprehension tests administered as a pretest and post-test. In addition, a student reading test was used to capture learners' skills in Instagram-based reading activities. The findings revealed that students' post-test scores significantly outperformed their pre-test scores, with a notable increase in their mean post-test scores ($M = 69.00$) compared to the pretest scores ($M = 59.60$). Independent samples T-test analysis confirmed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$), indicating that Instagram effectively supports reading comprehension improvement. Moreover, students reported higher motivation and engagement when learning through Instagram. These results suggest that Instagram can serve as an innovative and authentic medium to enhance reading skills in EFL contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of social media platforms such as Instagram has the potential to improve language learning, with a more interactive and student-centered approach. Instagram can significantly improve writing skills and intrinsic motivation (Putri et al., 2025; Rahayu et al., 2025). The use of social media and support from educational institutions, can enrich students' learning experiences and encourage their active involvement (Hadinuddin et al., 2025).

Mobile Assisted Language Learning is prevalent in teaching English, but its effectiveness and practicality are rarely well confirmed (Mulyadi et al., 2022). Mobile learning media can be used as student-centered language learning (Cahyana et al., 2018; Burston, 2017). Research findings encourage teachers to increase the popularity of Instagram among students for learning purposes through classroom learning (Damaryanan & Subekti, 2024).

Improving reading skills requires learning media that are familiar to students. Mobile learning media, such as smartphones and Instagram, are considered more accessible and practical both inside and outside the classroom compared to computer-based learning media because most students already have smartphones ([Mutiarasari et al., 2020](#); [Khasanah & Rizal, 2023](#)). Learning English using mobile phones or Instagram allows students to access learning resources more quickly ([Wan Azli et al., 2018](#)).

Most students today feel that reading is not an interesting activity because they get bored easily and pay less attention to reading skills. The commitment they gave to reading activities before implementing Instagram videos was quite low ([Morshidi et al., 2019](#); [Khairuddin, 2013](#)). Students have a good perception about using Instagram for language learning because the videos and photos uploaded on Instagram accounts are easy to understand and fun ([Astiyandha & Irwansyah, 2024](#)). Students are not aware of how their interests affect their comprehension abilities, so it is important to find this relationship ([O'Flynn, 2016](#)). Instagram can be utilized as a teaching tool in reading classes because of its effectiveness and functionality ([Rinda et al., 2018](#); [Niño et al., 2024](#); [Syachsalsabillah & Hamid, 2024](#)).

Reading is the ability to understand a text and to summarize it well ([Reflianto et al., 2021](#); [Azmuddin et al., 2020](#)). Reading tests are used to improve students' reading skills. The discourse test must contain information that demands student understanding ([Irwansyah et al., 2019](#); [Febrina et al., 2019](#)). The reading ability test can connect and generalize discourse concepts through synthesis skills. These skills consist of synthetic-level cognitive activities as a high-level and complex activity ([Lazarus, 2020](#)).

Students consider Instagram as a valuable tool for interactive, interesting, and enjoyable English learning as a major factor in developing their positive learning experience ([Saifuddin et al., 2024](#); [Sarwoko et al., 2024](#); [Thomas & Park, 2020](#)). Inspired by literature that has shown the benefits of using Instagram as a teaching and learning tool ([Handayani, 2015](#); [Khalitova & Gimaletdinova, 2016](#)), researchers designed Instagram reading activities to measure student reading ability improvement. Through Instagram, teachers can create a dynamic and interactive learning environment for students ([Méndez, 2024](#); [Handayani et al., 2018](#)).

The use of Instagram encourages students to have a positive attitude towards the use of mobile technology in learning new vocabulary ([Alzahrani, 2015](#); [Zárate & Cisterna, 2017](#); [La'biran et al., 2024](#); [Baruti & Subekti, 2023](#); [Al-Ali, 2014](#)). Instagram allows students to exchange views and opinions on various topics ([Suryantari & Priyana, 2018](#); [Akhiar et al., 2017](#)). They read each other's writings through the use of Instagram ([Thomas, 2019](#); [Ramalia, 2021](#); [Alhabash & Ma, 2017](#)).

The research on the Enhancing EFL Students' Reading Comprehension through Instagram is important to conduct because it is still limited, and there are still few researchers who have conducted research on this theme. Meanwhile, this study aims to reveal the students' reading comprehension improvement and to explore students' reading ability through Instagram.

The difference between the results of this study and previous studies is that this study used a quasi-experiment by comparing the pretest and posttest scores of students' reading abilities. The results of data analysis show that Instagram plays an important role in improving learning outcomes in reading courses. Instagram, as an interpretive reading learning medium, can increase student learning motivation because this platform is interesting and fun. It is an application for accessing English vocabulary, for searching for reading texts, and for sharing information.

Despite a growing body of research on the use of Instagram in English language teaching, most previous studies have focused more on student motivation and engagement in improving writing skills than on reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, previous studies often prioritized student perceptions of Instagram use, employing survey-based designs, with limited experimental evidence examining the effect of Instagram use on student reading performance. Another limitation is that many studies used teacher-designed, textbook-based materials, rather than authentic social media content, which could reflect real-world English language skills and improve students' reading ability.

To address this gap, this study investigates the implementation of Instagram as a medium to improve EFL students' reading skills using authentic Instagram texts, visuals, and comments in a quasi-experimental design. The novelty of this study lies in its dual focus on the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading. Furthermore, by situating this research in the Indonesian EFL context, where reading skills are often perceived as difficult and tedious, this study provides theoretical insights and practical implications for integrating Instagram into higher education language learning.

METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a one-group pretest–post-test approach to examine the effectiveness of Instagram-based instruction in improving students' reading comprehension. A pretest was administered before the intervention, followed by an eight-week treatment, and concluded with a post-test. To enhance methodological rigor, validity, and reliability checks of the instruments, treatment fidelity, and statistical analyses were carefully conducted.

Participants

The population of this study comprised 150 undergraduate students (six intact classes) enrolled in the fourth semester of the English Education Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang during the 2024/2025 academic year. Using purposive sampling, one intact class of students enrolled in the *Reading Comprehension* course (n = 28) was selected as the sample.

The sample consisted of 28 students (22 female, 6 male), aged 19–21 years. Participants reported daily use of Instagram, averaging 1–2 hours, ensuring familiarity with the platform. The research sample was determined based on the following criteria: (a) students were in their 4th semester, (b) they were officially registered in the course, and (c) they were active Instagram users with internet access.

Data collection technique and procedure

This study used a Reading Comprehension Test as data. A 40-item multiple-choice test was developed to assess students' reading comprehension. The test items were classified into three skill domains: literal comprehension (16 items), inferential comprehension (14 items), and contextual vocabulary (10 items). The text sources included authentic Instagram captions, short narratives, expository texts, and argumentative paragraphs relevant to the treatment. Each item had four choices with one correct answer (scoring: 1 = true, 0 = false; maximum score = 40).

To ensure the quality of the research instrument, several procedures were undertaken to establish its validity and reliability. Content validity was verified by three experts in English education and reading pedagogy, who carefully reviewed each test item for its relevance, clarity, and representativeness to the intended reading skills. The experts' evaluations yielded a Scale-level Content Validity Index (S-CVI/Ave) of 0.92, which exceeds the recommended minimum threshold of 0.90, indicating that the items were highly valid in measuring the targeted constructs. Furthermore, pilot testing was conducted with 30 non-participant students to examine the difficulty and discrimination indices of the test items. Only items that met acceptable statistical criteria difficulty indices ranging from 0.30 to 0.80 and discrimination indices above 0.30 were retained for the final test. Finally, the reliability of the instrument was determined using the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), which produced a coefficient value of 0.87, demonstrating high internal consistency and confirming that the test items were stable and reliable for assessing students' reading comprehension.

The study was carried out over a ten-week period, following a structured sequence to ensure systematic implementation and consistency across all research stages. In the **first week**, students completed a 40-item reading comprehension pretest administered under standardized paper-based conditions within a 60-minute time limit. This pretest was designed to assess their initial reading ability prior to the intervention. The **treatment phase**, conducted over **eight consecutive weeks (Weeks 2–9)**, involved weekly instructional sessions lasting 90 minutes each. During these sessions, students engaged in a variety of Instagram-based reading activities, including analyzing captions, interpreting infographic posts, responding to persuasive messages, and summarizing short videos. All instructional sessions adhered to a detailed lesson plan to maintain treatment fidelity and ensure that learning objectives were consistently met. Finally, in the **tenth week**, students completed a post-test that was equivalent and parallel in format, difficulty, and content coverage to the pretest, thereby minimizing potential testing effects and ensuring comparability of results. This sequence of activities enabled the researchers to systematically measure the impact of Instagram-based learning on students' reading comprehension.

To monitor treatment fidelity, the instructor used a checklist for each session, ensuring that all planned activities were implemented consistently. Engagement was tracked by recording students' number of posts, comments, and task submissions on Instagram. Test papers were scored

dichotomously (correct = 1, incorrect = 0). Raw scores were converted into percentages and categorized as follows: Very Good ($\geq 85\%$), Good (70–84%), Moderate (55–69%), Low (40–54%), and Very Low ($< 40\%$). Data were entered into SPSS v.25 for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed a systematic quantitative procedure to examine the effectiveness of Instagram-based instruction on students' reading comprehension. Initially, **descriptive statistics** including the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were calculated to summarize students' pretest and post-test performance. The **normality of gain scores** was then tested using the **Shapiro–Wilk test** to determine the appropriate statistical method for further analysis. For data that met the assumption of normality, a **paired-samples t-test** was conducted to identify significant differences between pretest and post-test mean scores.

Conversely, when the data did not meet normality assumptions, a **Wilcoxon signed-rank test** served as the non-parametric alternative. To assess the magnitude of improvement, **effect sizes** were computed using **Cohen's d** for parametric data and r for non-parametric data. In addition, **Pearson's correlation analysis** was performed to explore the relationship between students' engagement metrics on Instagram such as the number of posts and comments and their reading comprehension gains. This comprehensive analytical approach allowed for both statistical verification of improvement and exploration of engagement-related factors contributing to students' reading development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted for eight weeks in the Interpretive Reading class of the English Language Education study program, FKIP, University of Muhammadiyah Malang. The first week is used to give a pre-test to 28 students. From the pre-test activities, an average score of 59.60 was obtained. After the pre-test activities were carried out, students were then given lecture material adapted from Instagram content. There are several Instagram contents that are used as learning media as well as lecture material. The content is accessed via the internet and then selected and delivered to students as learning media in class. The Instagram content is delivered to students for 6 X 100 minutes according to the lecture schedule. Class schedules with Instagram content as learning media can be seen in [Table 1](#) as follows.

After presenting lecture material for eight weeks, accompanied by media from Instagram content as a treatment, the next activity is measuring student learning outcomes. Measurement of student learning outcomes is done by giving a post-test or final test. This final test was designed not only to measure learning outcomes but also to see the role of Instagram media in students' reading skills. The final test was prepared using an objective test model with multiple-choice forms. The use of objective tests is adjusted to the competency being measured, namely, interpretive reading. As a reading skill, interpretive reading requires an instrument that can measure student achievement validly.

TABLE 1 | Instagram Content as Learning Media

No.	Day	Instagram Content	Message Content
1	19-09-2022	Pre-test	Score: 59.60
2	26-09-2022		Sayap-Sayap Patah Movie Content. Sayap-Sayap Patah is a film that tells the story of the romance between a man and a woman, played by Aji, who works as a police officer, and his wife, Nani. The story of the Sayap-Sayap Patah Film was adapted from the true story of the 2018 Mako Brimob Riot.
3	03-10-2022		Citayem Fashion Show content. Citayem Fashion Show is an arena for creativity in appearance by teenagers or newly grown children. Citayem Fashion Show activities are widely discussed by people, generally netizens on social media. Their activities include taking photos or selfies around Jakarta, such as Jalan Jenderal Sudirman, Citayem, Bojonggede, and Depok (SCBD). They show off the clothes and accessories they wear by waddling in the traffic light road markings when the vehicle stops waiting for a red light. Their style is like the models walking on the catwalk, so that many road users look up to them. Not infrequently, the road users stop and pay attention to them because the appearance of the teenager is attractive and attracts attention.
4	10-10-2022		Culinary Content. Various kinds of cuisine in the city of Malang. Gebuk Sate Shop provides a menu of beef satay, which is crushed so that the meat is soft. This dish is very popular among Malang residents because of its delicious taste.

5 17-10-2022



Food and beverage content. Special food from Malang, grilled meatballs, and squid chicken noodles. This shop serves a food menu that is different from those in other cities. This shop provides food such as chicken, squid noodles, and grilled meatballs, as well as various drinks such as young coconut ice, ginger tea, mixed ice, etc.

6 24-10-2022



Entertainment Content. The Beachbuds is an animation loved by children in countries such as Australia, Japan, and Latin America. This entertainment is broadcast on television and gets a wide response from its viewers. The Beachbuds is broadcast in prime time so that it gets a high rating like other animations, namely, SpongeBob, SquarePants, and Lego.

7 31-10-2022



Environmental Content. This content tells us all about the dangers of tobacco, which can kill humans and poison the earth. This video clip reminds us to leave tobacco in cigarettes because it damages the body through toxic substances in them, such as Nicotine, Tar, Benzene, etc.

8 07-11-2022

post-test

Score: 69.00

It is evident from the final exam results that Instagram media enhances students' comprehension of the course subject. The final test results of 28 students obtained an average score of 69.00. When compared with the pre-test value of 59.60, the post-test value is greater. The difference between the pre-test and post-test is 9.4. If the difference in

pre-test and post-test scores is analyzed using the SPSS program, the result is a T-test = 0.962. The results of this T-test are significant because the p-value is greater than the Sig value. 0.000. The relationship between the Pre-test, Treatment, and Post-test scores can be seen in [Table 2](#) below as follows.

TABLE 2 | Pre-test, Treatment, and Post-test

Pre-test Score	Treatment	Post-test Score
59.60	8 Meeting/weeks	69.00

According to statistical data, there is a correlation between before and after the learning process using Instagram as a learning medium. This data can be seen in [Table 3](#) below.

TABLE 3 | Statistical Data Analysis Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Sebelum Belajar	59.6071	28	2.85889	.54028
	Setelah Belajar	69.0000	28	2.82843	.53452

[Table 3](#) above explains that before giving the material using Instagram media, the average test value was 59.60, the number of students was 28, the standard deviation was 2.85889, and the mean standard error was 0.54028. Meanwhile, the score after giving the material using Instagram media was the average value; the test mean was 69.00, the number of students was 28, the standard deviation was 2.82843, and the mean standard error was 0.53452. This means that there is a positive correlation between before and after the learning process using Instagram media.

Meanwhile, the significance value of the T-test for pre-test and post-test values can be seen in [Table 4](#) below.

TABLE 4 | The Significance of the T-test Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Sebelum Belajar & Setelah Belajar	28	.962	.000

[Table 4](#) explains that the Sig. $0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation value is 0.926. It can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between before and after learning with Instagram media.

The study indicates that Instagram can be used as a learning medium to improve student reading achievement. It has been proven that there are significant differences between before and after learning using Instagram media. Before learning, the pre-test results were 59.60. After learning 6 times face-to-face/week using Instagram learning media, the post-test results show the number 69.00. The results of statistical analysis using SPSS show that the T-test results are 0.962. This means that there is a significant difference between before and after teaching and learning activities using Instagram media. Instagram is a smartphone application for learning English, such as searching for reading texts and vocabulary. The results of the research answered the research problems previously mentioned, namely: What is the role of Instagram in improving students' reading skills?

The results of this study were supported by data consisting of 28 students as the research sample. From the research results, it can be said that using Instagram helps students develop reading skills. Using Instagram can help them find interesting ideas from reading texts. Instagram can be used to help them improve their English vocabulary. This means that applying Instagram as a learning medium in English classes can help students improve their reading skills, access valuable ideas, and improve vocabulary mastery.

The results of this quasi-experimental study indicate that Instagram-based learning significantly improves EFL students' reading comprehension. The improvement in post-test scores compared to pre-test results suggests that integrating authentic Instagram materials into reading instruction can increase engagement, motivation, and comprehension. These results are consistent with previous research that observed the positive influence of social media-based learning on students' linguistic and affective development ([Putri et al., 2025](#); [Rahayu et al., 2025](#)). However, this study extends previous research by providing experimental evidence, rather than solely relying on self-reported perceptions.

The observed improvements can be attributed to several pedagogical efforts on Instagram. First, Instagram's multimodal nature, which combines text, image, and comment interactions, supports students' cognitive processing and contextual understanding. Based on multimedia learning theory, dual-channel input that is visual and verbal enhances comprehension by facilitating more concrete encoding and integration of meaning. Furthermore, [Al-Ali \(2014\)](#) and [Akhiar et al. \(2017\)](#) explain that image-supported text helps students read critically and imaginatively. In this study, students engaged in reading activities involving Instagram captions, short narratives, and infographic posts, all of which improved inferential and interpretive comprehension skills. These activities align with constructivist learning theory, which explains that students construct meaning through active interaction with authentic and meaningful content.

Second, enhanced reading performance can also be related to affective engagement. As previously reported, enjoyment, curiosity, and relevance significantly support reading motivation in digital contexts ([Méndez, 2024](#); [Thomas, 2019](#)). The familiar and interactive environment of Instagram lowers learner anxiety and increases positive attitudes toward reading ([Sarwoko et al., 2024](#)). These findings support the notion that students' positive emotional connection with digital media increases their willingness to read and comprehend English texts ([Khalitova & Gimaletdinova, 2016](#)). Therefore, affective engagement should be considered a key mediating factor between Instagram use and reading comprehension achievement.

Third, the findings indicated that Instagram serves as a form of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) that encourages self-directed learning. Students' daily exposure to English through Instagram creates incidental learning opportunities that foster vocabulary retention and contextual understanding ([Burston, 2017](#); [Niño et al., 2024](#)). The integration of Instagram into classroom activities facilitates both formal and informal learning processes, aligning with the

blended learning paradigm. Therefore, the quasi-experimental results support the argument that mobile applications effectively complement traditional reading instruction, especially in EFL contexts where exposure to authentic English materials is limited (Mutiarasari et al., 2020).

Despite the positive results, the score increase (from 59.60 to 69.00) was moderate. This moderate increase suggests that while Instagram increased engagement and comprehension, its effects may have been limited by the short duration of the intervention and the limited scope of the reading tasks. Short-term interventions develop early-level comprehension (literal comprehension), while higher-order skills such as inference making, synthesis, and critical evaluation require longer exposure and structured instruction. Furthermore, the use of multiple-choice tests, while reliable, limits the interpretive and analytical dimensions of reading comprehension. Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative testing and qualitative discourse analysis to capture a wider range of learning outcomes.

The present study contributes new evidence to the growing body of research on social media in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education by changing the focus from writing and motivation to reading comprehension outcomes. While previous studies (e.g., Damaryanan & Subekti, 2024; Syachsalsabillah & Hamid, 2024) have primarily focused on Instagram's motivational effects, this study empirically demonstrates its cognitive benefits through a quasi-experimental framework. The findings thus support a more holistic understanding of digital literacy, in which the cognitive (comprehension) and affective (interest and motivation) domains are interconnected.

From an educational perspective, this study confirms that English language instructors need to design reading activities that utilize authentic and multimodal Instagram content. Tasks such as text translation, comment analysis, and thematic summaries help students connect visual stimuli with textual meaning, thereby enhancing comprehension. Furthermore, instructors need to guide students in critically evaluating online content, which enhances digital literacy and critical reading, thus developing skills essential for 21st-century communication. Institutional support plays a crucial role in providing digital infrastructure and teacher training to effectively integrate mobile technology in EFL classrooms.

Finally, although this study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single institution, it provides a valuable foundation for future comparative research. Longitudinal or cross-platform studies (e.g., comparing Instagram with TikTok, YouTube, or Vlogs) could further explain how different digital uses affect specific aspects of reading ability. Overall, this study provides empirical support for the use of Instagram in higher education EFL contexts, indicating its potential to enhance reading comprehension through authentic, multimodal, and engaging learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that Instagram can be used as a learning medium to improve

reading skills. This means integrating Instagram in the classroom allows students to improve learning outcomes. This is because Instagram can help them access the main ideas and vocabulary of a reading text.

This study demonstrated that the integration of Instagram-based materials into EFL reading instruction can positively enhance undergraduate students' reading comprehension skills. The quasi-experimental design revealed a statistically significant improvement in post-test performance compared to the pre-test, indicating that Instagram content provides meaningful support in developing interpretive reading. Although the observed improvement was modest, the findings confirm that digital platforms can serve as effective supplementary tools when embedded within structured pedagogical frameworks.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results suggest that English lecturers should consider incorporating Instagram into reading courses as an authentic and multimodal resource. By engaging students with real-world content that ranges from cultural, culinary, and entertainment texts to environmental issues, teachers can foster not only comprehension skills but also vocabulary development and critical engagement with diverse genres. Importantly, Instagram can be used to design collaborative classroom activities, stimulate discussions, and motivate learners by bridging academic reading practices with students' digital literacy practices. However, instructors are encouraged to integrate Instagram alongside conventional materials and guided instructional strategies, ensuring that its use supports rather than replaces systematic reading instruction.

For future research, several avenues deserve attention. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustained impact of Instagram on higher-order reading skills, including critical analysis and inferencing. Second, comparative research with other digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or digital newspapers could illuminate the platform-specific affordances for literacy development. Third, future studies should expand to larger and more diverse samples to increase generalizability. Finally, adopting mixed-methods designs, which combine test-based data with qualitative measures such as discourse analysis, learner reflections, or classroom interaction analysis, would provide richer insights into how Instagram shapes students' reading processes and engagement.

In sum, this study contributes empirical evidence to the growing scholarship on digital literacy in EFL contexts, underscoring the pedagogical potential of Instagram as an accessible and motivating tool for enhancing reading comprehension. By situating language learning within students' everyday digital environments, educators can create more contextualized, engaging, and effective reading instruction in higher education.

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