Uncovering Gender Differences in Saudi EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of Instagram as a Language Learning Tool

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Abstract

The widespread popularity of social media networks has encouraged learners to use them for learning purposes. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the overall Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. It also examined the effect of gender on learners' attitudes. The study was conducted among 120 male and female EFL learners at Qassim University using a questionnaire. The results revealed that subjects had relatively positive attitudes toward the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The results also indicated that there are no significant differences between male and female EFL learners in terms of their attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The study concluded with implications related to how Instagram should be used as a supportive tool in English language teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

In the present century, online social websites are considered as one of the essential phenomena of technology due to the increasing number of users around the world (Aljaad, 2016). Internet and social media websites make people live in a global village as they enable users to browse different websites concurrently (Ta'amneh, 2018). Social software technologies have become an integral part of individuals' life as well as English language

learners' life as they enable learners to be frequently exposed to language due to their effective use of social platforms for learning or communication purposes (Alsharidi, 2018). The everyday use of the internet has played an active role in the improvement of students' English language and has brought significant changes in the way students use information (AlQahtani, 2018). Therefore, on account of the increasing popularity of social network sites, educationists tend to use them as a learning tool since such social media platforms as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter are considered as a plentiful and renewable source for education.

Current trends in language learning and teaching encourage the integration of technology into the learning and teaching process (Gonulal, 2019). The field of education, in general, is undergoing rapid changes in terms of teaching approaches and methods that require adopting new technologies in and out of the classroom in view of the interests and needs of students and teachers (Aloraini, 2018). Sharma (2018) claims that "amalgamating social media into course specification, course objectives, and curriculum may seem a relatively new field but surely have a great potential to carve niches in students' EFL learning" (p. 138). Instagram is one of plenty of social media network sites that have been popular all around the world.

People use Instagram for different purposes; they may use it for entertainment, business, or even learning. Even though Instagram is not designed as an educational application, language learners use it actively in language learning (Gonulal, 2019). Erarslan (2019) claims that Instagram is a useful and motivating tool for fostering learning. Instagram provides learners with interesting content that includes short videos and attractive figures and photos.

1.1 Context of the Problem

It is the researcher's belief that Saudi English language learners need to find resources to improve and practice their knowledge and skills because they cannot practice their English language in everyday life as they live in an Arabic environment. The widespread acceptance and use of social media among people, including students, "have drawn attention to investigate the benefit and drawbacks of these modern technologies for educational purposes including English language learning" (Alqarni et al., 2018, p. 10662). The number of educators and learners who use these tools for communication and interaction is consistently increasing, which ensures the importance of employing social networks in learning English as an alternative to the traditional approaches (Chartrand, 2012). Therefore, social media networks can be an effective resource for learning English.

Instagram is one of these social media platforms that provide learners with engaging content that includes short videos and attractive figures and photos. Learners' background and beliefs about Instagram's effectiveness in learning determine their use of Instagram as a learning tool. Thus, learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool should be investigated.

A considerable amount of research has been undertaken to examine the role of social media networks in learning (Aljaad, 2017; AlQahtani, 2018; Vivakaran & Neelamalar, 2018). Other investigations have explored students' attitudes and perspectives towards the use of social

media networks in learning (Aifan, 2015; Alqarni et al., 2019; Bal & Bicen, 2017; Beqiri, 2014; Sharma, 2019; Ta'amneh, 2018)

Although the literature is replete with studies regarding the use of such social media platforms as Facebook and Twitter for educational purposes (AbuSa'aleek, 2015; Alsharidi, 2018; Gamble & Wilkins, 2014; Junco et al., 2010; Kaya & Bicen, 2016; Razak et al., 2013), Instagram has not been studied in detail in terms of its use for educational purposes.

Some studies (Al-Ali, 2014; Erarslan, 2019; Gunolal, 2019; Shazali et al., 2019; Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018) have suggested that Instagram could be utilized as a useful tool to improve learners' English language skills. However, few studies have investigated Instagram as a language learning tool. Additionally, very few studies have considered gender differences in students' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The present study, therefore, intends to examine the impact of students' gender on their attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool.

1.2 Problem of the Study

As introduced above, there is a persistent need to investigate how Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool differ according to their gender. This study will be an extension to what has been done in regard to social network sites as language learning tools (Aifan, 2015; Al-Ali, 2014; Aljaad, 2016; AlQahtani, 2018; Erarslan, 2019; Gunolal, 2019)

1.3 Research Questions

1- What are Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool?

2- To what extent do gender differences affect Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool?

1.4 Hypothesis of the Study

1- Saudi EFL learners have positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool.

2- There are no significant effects of gender on Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, this study is intended to give further information about learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. It also extends the discussion about learners' attitudes by looking at the effect of gender on learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. Practically, this study provides EFL instructors with guidelines to adopt Instagram as a supplementary teaching tool in and out of the classroom.

1.6 Review of Literature

1.6.1 Theoretical Background

The theoretical formulation of the relationship between technology and learning as a cooperative and collaborative process is usually in terms of constructivism, social learning theory, cooperative learning theory, and, more recently, collaboration theory (Hmelo-Silver, 2006). According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, education is not merely a cognitive process, but it is also a socio-cultural theory that requires social interaction between learners. Jacobs et al. (2002) defined cooperative learning as "principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively" (p. 1). Social learning theory associates learning with behavior, and "emphasizes the continuous reciprocal interaction between the factors of individuals' behavior (cognitive) and environmental influences in understanding social cognitive learning process" (Harinie et al., 2017, p. 1). These theories can have beneficial implications in learning as social media network sites can help learners practice and improve their English language in a collaborative and interactive community.

1.6.2 Related Studies

1.6.2.1 Social Media

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the use of social media platforms in language learning. Vivakaran and Neelamalar (2018) surveyed faculty members in higher educational institutions in urban and technologically deprived rural areas to examine the role of social media websites as teaching aids in higher education. They reported that only a few faculty members were found to be experimenting with social media as a pedagogical tool in their classes. The researchers also indicated that students affected faculty members' motivation to use social media tools in their classrooms.

As regards students' beliefs and perspectives, Bal and Bicen (2017) conducted a quantitative study using a questionnaire to determine the purpose of Turkish students' use of social media and to explore their perspectives on the use of social media in education. The study revealed that social media enables students to acquire new information and provides them with integrative learning that contributes to their lesson achievements through online study groups, which provides them with an active environment that enhances their motivation. Additionally, using a structured questionnaire, Beqiri (2014) explored the current usage of social media and the impact of social media in higher education from students' perspectives. The findings of Beqiri's study indicated that social media has a positive impact on students in terms of study-related activities and on students' communication.

Yang and Tang (2003) conducted a Web-based forum study to explore how social networks affect students' performance in online education. They found that advising network variables affected students' performance positively, while adversarial variables affected students' performance negatively.

In the Saudi context, Ta'amneh (2018) investigated Saudi learners' attitudes towards the effect of social media in developing their English language. He found that Saudi learners have

positive attitudes towards the use of social media in developing their English language. In addition, Aifan (2015) investigated the factors and barriers affecting Saudi students' attitudes towards using social media. She found that students' attitudes towards using social media for learning are affected by five factors, which are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, subjective norms, experience with Skype, and age. Concerning the berries that prevent students from using social media, students reported that some social media contents oppose their religious beliefs, and their concerns about privacy and security issues limit their use of social media.

1.6.2.2 Twitter

Many studies have investigated the use of different social media platforms for educational purposes. Twitter is a social media platform that has been popular all around the world. Therefore, some researchers have studied Twitter as a language learning tool. Using a mixed-method approach, Alsharidi (2018) explored Saudi female EFL learners' perceptions of Twitter as a tool for practicing English. The findings revealed that learners' use of English in their communication was purposed for social purposes rather than educational purposes. In addition, she found that students' use of Twitter to practice English enables them to be engaged in real English contexts, which helps them develop their language easily.

Some other studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of Twitter in teaching particular language skills. Mompean and Fouz-Gonzalez (2016) carried out a study using a Twitter-based program with students from a language school in Spain to examine the effectiveness of using Twitter in teaching pronunciation. The results showed that Twitter was an effective tool for teaching pronunciation. As regards writing, Taskiran et al. (2016) employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to examine the effectiveness of Twitter in practicing creative writing outside the classroom. The findings revealed that Twitter was a supporting platform that reinforces writing activities outside the classroom.

Junco et al. (2010) carried on an experimental study to investigate the impact of using Twitter for educationally relevant purposes on students' engagement. The researchers found that the use of twitter increased students' engagement.

1.6.2.3 Facebook

Gamble and Wilkins (2014) surveyed Japanese students to investigate their attitudes and perceptions towards the usefulness of Facebook in participating in language learning activities. The findings showed that students' perspectives towards the ease of using Facebook for educational purposes were positive. Moreover, the results indicated that students' attitudes towards the usefulness of Facebook in participating in specific language learning activities were generally positive. Similarly, in the Saudi context, AbuSa'aleek (2015) undertook a quantitative study to investigate students' affective domains. The findings indicated that Facebook facilitates and supports language learning, and Facebook enhances students' motivation and confidence in English language learning.

In regard to language skills, some researchers carried out some studies to investigate the effectiveness of using Facebook in learning particular language learning skills. For example,

to examine the effectiveness of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as online communities of practice, Razak et al. (2013) adopted Facebook as an interactive and collaborative community for practicing writing. They found that Facebook, as an interactive learning environment, enhanced learners' writing and engagement with their instructors and peers.

1.6.2.4 Instagram

Few studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of Instagram as a language learning tool. Both Aloraini (2018) and Gunolal (2019) undertook their studies among Instagram users who use it for English language learning to investigate Instagram as a language learning tool. Aloraini's (2018) findings indicated that vocabulary posts encouraged commenters to give more output. She also indicated that the type of posts does not affect learners' output quality and does not raise the amount of feedback provided for learners. Gunolal (2019) reported that learners have positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram for language learning.

Erarslan (2019) conducted a mixed-method study to explore students' opinions about the use of Instagram for educational purposes and its impact on students' language learning. The findings showed that students favor using Instagram for language learning, and indicated that using Instagram has a positive impact on students' language learning based on the scores derived from the experimental part.

In respect to the use of Instagram for specific language skills, Soviyah and Etikaningsih (2018) investigated the effectiveness of the use of Instagram on students' performance in writing descriptive texts by comparing two groups of students, one of them was taught using Instagram pictures, while the other was taught without using Instagram pictures. He reported that using Instagram pictures had a positive effect on students' performance in writing descriptive texts. Similarly, Handayani et al. (2018) conducted a pre-experimental study to examine the effectiveness of Instagram in improving students' ability to write opinion essays and investigated students' perceptions of the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. They indicated that Instagram was effective in improving the quality of students' essays. They also indicated that students viewed Instagram as an effective and enjoyable educational tool to be used in the class. However, the previous studies show that gender differences in students' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool have not received considerable consideration. Therefore, the current paper attempts to address this gap.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

Saudi EFL undergraduates who were enrolled in the department of English and Translation at Qassim University were invented to respond to a questionnaire. Sixty males and sixty females completed the questionnaire. The subjects were selected because they have practical and relevant experience in English language learning. The subjects were native speakers of Arabic, and they were from different levels as the use of Instagram as a language learning tool applies to different levels of learning.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was used as a primary instrument for this study. The questionnaire items were adopted from Gunolal's (2019) Six-Likert scale questionnaire, and they were not changed. The present study modified the design of Gunolal's (2019) questionnaire to be based on a five-point Likert scale to make it easier for the subjects to respond to it. The questionnaire consists of 15 closed-ended questions written in English, as the subjects were EFL learners. Reliability Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to assess the level of reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha level was 0.91, which indicates a high consistency of reliability.

The questionnaire was designed using Google form and published via social media during the second semester of the academic year 2020. EFL learners at Qassim University were requested to complete it anonymously. In order to facilitate the analysis of data, the researcher used two forms of the questionnaire. One form was addressed to the males, and the other was addressed to females. The two questionnaires included the same questions.

2.3 Data Analysis

After collecting subjects' responses from the questionnaire, the data were analyzed statistically using SPSS 15.0 package program. Frequencies mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyze each item of the questionnaire. Following Gunolal's (2019) method, the researcher divided attitudes into positive and negative, although the Five-Likert Scale questionnaire was used. The researcher used a questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale to make it easier for the subjects to respond to the questions. The differences between male and female learners were analyzed using a t-test for independent samples, and significant levels were set at $p<0.05$.

3. Results and Discussion

This study aims to answer two questions. The first question dealt with overall Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The second question focused on the impact of gender on the learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The results are presented and discussed according to the order of the research questions as follows:

3.1 Analysis of Saudi EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of Instagram as a Language Learning Tool

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the overall EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The results were given as mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 1. Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool

Statements	M	SD
Instagram is suitable for educational purposes.	3.16	1.092
Instagram is a good platform to practice writing in English.	2.91	1.138
Instagram is a good platform to read in English.	3.78	1.022
Instagram is a good platform to develop English communication skills.	3.68	0.953
Instagram is a good platform to overcome language mistakes.	3.03	1.069
Instagram is a good platform to learn new words in English.	4.24	0.953
Instagram is a good platform to improve English grammar knowledge.	2.95	1.144
Instagram is a good platform to improve overall English skills.	3.44	0.915
Instagram is a good platform to reach authentic English materials.	3.05	0.995
Instagram makes learning English more interesting.	3.87	0.952
Instagram makes learning English easier.	3.5	0.953
Instagram increases my motivation to communicate using English.	3.77	1.035
Instagram increases my motivation to read English materials.	3.67	0.982
Instagram increases my motivation to write in English.	3.4	1.016
Instagram encourages me to spend more time learning English.	3.35	1.001

Overall, subjects had relatively positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool (M=3.16, SD=1.092). Specifically, when looking at the educational purposes of using Instagram, subjects largely discerned that Instagram can be a good platform to learn new vocabulary (M=4.24, SD=0.953). Learners can learn new vocabulary through Instagram due to its capability to combine texts with photos and videos, which helps learners be exposed to new words optimally. They also believed that Instagram could be a good platform to read in English (M=3.78, SD=1.022) and develop English communication skills (M=3.68, SD=0.953). Instagram enables learners to interact and discuss ideas with native speakers, which promotes a wider sense of social community (Beqiri, 2014; Gunolal, 2019; Renaldi, 2020).

Further, subjects believed that Instagram makes learning English more interesting (M=3.87, SD=0.952), increases learners' motivation to communicate using English (M=3.77, SD=1.035), and increases learners' motivation to read English materials (M=3.67, SD=0.982). Also, learners considered Instagram as a good platform to overcome language mistakes (M=3.03, SD=1.069). This result is expected because Instagram includes many accounts that provide learners with videos that help them understand how to use language perfectly. Moreover, subjects had mostly positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of Instagram in enhancing their motivation to write in English (M=3.4, SD=1.016). This can be attributed to the attractive visual content that Instagram provides, which can help them brainstorm new ideas and topics. Thus, this result is consistent with the study of Soviyah and Etikaningsih (2018), which indicated that "teaching students writing by using Instagram pictures is more effective than teaching without using Instagram pictures." (p. 32).

On the other hand, subjects had slightly negative attitudes towards the effectiveness of Instagram in practicing writing (M=2.91, SD=1.138). In the same vein, Akhiar et al. (2017) indicated that "students demonstrated mediocre attitudes towards using Instagram for English language writing" (p. 56). By contrast, Shazali et al. (2019) pointed out that students had positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram for writing. In addition, subjects had slightly negative attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a tool for improving English grammar knowledge (M =2.95, SD=1.144). Gunolal (2019) attributed this to the informal language that Instagram users may use.

The findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool were mostly positive. The results of this study tie well with previous studies, wherein Gunolal (2019) demonstrated that ELLs had positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. Consequently, the previous discussion verifies the validity of the first research hypothesis, "*Saudi EFL learners have positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool*."

3.2 Analysis of Gender Effect on Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of Instagram as a Language Learning Tool

Another aim of this study was to examine whether there are any significant differences between male and female EFL Saudi learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool in relation to the questionnaire items. Towards this end, an independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis that there are no significant effects of gender on Saudi learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool.

Table 2. Gender differences in Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool

Statements	Gender	N	M	SD	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Instagram is suitable for educational purposes.	Male	60	3.22	1.223	111.283	0.561
	Female	60	3.10	0.951		
Instagram is a good platform to practice writing in English.	Male	60	2.97	1.235	118	0.576
	Female	60	2.85	1.039		
Instagram is a good platform to read in English.	Male	60	3.68	1.097	118	0.286
	Female	60	3.88	0.940		
Instagram is a good platform to develop English communication skills.	Male	60	3.57	1.031	118	0.181
	Female	60	3.80	0.860		
Instagram is a good platform to overcome language mistakes.	Male	60	2.85	1.117	118	0.060
	Female	60	3.22	0.993		
Instagram is a good platform to learn new words in English.	Male	60	4.15	1.039	118	0.294
	Female	60	4.33	0.857		
Instagram is a good platform to	Male	60	2.83	1.251	113.522	0.266

improve English grammar knowledge.	Female	60	3.07	1.023		
Instagram is a good platform to improve overall English skills.	Male	60	3.47	0.999	118	0.766
	Female	60	3.42	0.829		
Instagram is a good platform to reach authentic English materials.	Male	60	3.15	1.022	118	0.272
	Female	60	2.95	0.964		
Instagram makes learning English more interesting.	Male	60	3.78	1.075	109.756	0.340
	Female	60	3.95	0.811		
Instagram makes learning English easier.	Male	60	3.33	1.068	109.042	0.055
	Female	60	3.67	0.795		
Instagram increases my motivation to communicate using English.	Male	60	3.67	1.068	118	0.292
	Female	60	3.87	0.999		
Instagram increases my motivation to read English materials.	Male	60	3.60	1.045	118	0.459
	Female	60	3.73	0.918		
Instagram increases my motivation to write in English.	Male	60	3.38	1.106	118	0.858
	Female	60	3.42	0.926		
Instagram encourages me to spend more time learning English.	Male	60	3.30	1.094	118	0.586
	Female	60	3.40	0.906		

The data presented in Table 2 indicated that the difference between male and female Saudi learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool was not statistically significant in all of the items ($p > 0.05$). Accordingly, this result verifies the validity of the second research hypothesis "*There are no significant effects of gender on Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool*." The findings of this study as regards gender are consistent with those of Aifan (2015), who indicated that there were no significant differences between Saudi male and female students' attitudes towards the use of social media technologies to support their learning.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the overall attitudes of Saudi English language learners towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. It also aimed to find out the gender impact on learners' attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. The results revealed from the questionnaire showed that students have mostly positive attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool. It was also found that there were no significant differences between male and female leaners in terms of their attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a language learning tool.

The present study raises the possibility that Instagram should be used as a supportive tool in English language teaching and learning. Teachers can use Instagram to provide their students with interactive learning environments to enhance their motivation and performance in or

outside classrooms. Further, teachers can employ Instagram in the teaching process to provide collaborative and cooperative learning. Also, Instagram can be used as a useful tool for teaching and learning vocabulary. Additionally, teachers can use pictures and videos of Instagram to motivate students to brainstorm new ideas to write descriptive essays. However, teachers should be given courses on the most effective and appropriate use of such social media platforms in language teaching.

However, as with the majority of studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. The subjects were limited to Saudi learners at Qassim University. Therefore, it seems difficult to generalize the findings to the entire population of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, further research that might shed light on the same issue should employ interviews or experimental methods to provide a deeper understanding of the dimensions of using Instagram as a language learning tool.

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