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Leveraging Instagram Stories for EFL Learners' Syntactic Acquisition: A Quasi-Experimental Study on Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Instagram Stories as a learning medium to enhance EFL learners' syntactic competence. Employing a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design, this research involved 50 students from the Islamic Education Study Program at the Institute of Islamic Studies Nahdlatul Ulama Bangil. Participants were divided into an experimental group that received grammar instruction via Instagram Stories and a control group that received conventional instruction. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative results showed that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher improvement in post-test scores , from 55.3 to 78.6, compared to the control group, with a large effect size. The qualitative analysis revealed three main themes: student engagement, learning motivation, and usability. Participants reported that the visual and interactive features of Instagram Stories increased their interest in learning grammar, provided flexibility in accessing materials, and supported independent learning. The findings suggest that Instagram Stories can serve as an effective instructional medium for teaching basic grammar to digital-native EFL learners. The success of this medium aligns with Multimedia Learning Theory, Engagement Theory, and Dual Coding Theory. It is recommended that educators provide flexibility to learn independently by integrating familiar social media platforms into language inst ruction to create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment.

Keywords: Instagram Stories, grammar learning, EFL, syntactic competence, multimedia learning, engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The integration of technology in education continues to evolve, and social media platforms have emerged as potential tools to support language learning. Instagram, with over one billion active users worldwide (Statista, 2023), has become a dominant platform that can be leveraged in educational contexts. This aligns with Wang (2020), who revealed that social media can enhance student motivation and engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, Instagram provides interactive features such as Stories, polls, quizzes, and Direct Message that allow students to participate actively and receive immediate feedback. As stated by Alharbi (2021), higher student engagement can strengthen understanding of the material being studied. In addition, Mayer (2014) argued that visual elements in learning can facilitate understanding and memory.

In the context of EFL learning, grammar plays a crucial role in enabling learners to produce accurate language structures in both speaking and writing. However, traditional methods often fail to help students grasp grammar concepts effectively, and students frequently forget rules and formulas easily. Previous studies by Aydin (2021) and O'Brien (2022) showed that using Instagram stories can

improve language skills and encourage active student participation. Despite these findings, most existing research has focused on vocabulary building and speaking skills. For instance, previous research in Indonesia was limited to Islamic university students and focused on vocabulary. Consequently, empirical evidence on the use of Instagram Stories for teaching syntactic structures remains limited.

This gap is particularly significant in the Indonesian EFL context, where students still struggle with basic sentence structure. Most prior studies were also conducted in Western contexts and addressed grammar in general, rather than specific syntactic structures such as sentence complexity and clause formation. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the effectiveness of Instagram Stories in improving EFL learners' syntactic accuracy and complexity. The primary objective of this study is to measure the impact of Instagram-based tasks on students' syntactic performance and to examine students' perceptions in terms of engagement, motivation, and ease of use. To achieve these goals, this study addresses two research questions. First, to what extent does the use of Instagram Stories improve EFL students' syntactic performance compared to conventional methods? Second, how do EFL learners perceive the implementation of Instagram Stories in learning syntactic structures?

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Multimedia Learning Theory

This study is grounded in Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory, which posits that people than from words alone. Mayer (2005) argued that combining verbal and visual information can reduce cognitive load and improve understanding and retention. Instagram stories enable the integration of text, images, videos, and audio in a single format, which aligns with this principle.

Furthermore, Mayer's (2005) Modality Principle suggests that verbal information is more effectively conveyed through audio rather than written text, especially when supported by visual aids. In this study, grammar explanations were delivered through short videos and voiceovers with accompanying text. For example, explaining the difference between "their", "there", and "they're" can be made clear and memorable with visual aids and examples.

Mayer's (2005) Coherence Principle also highlights the importance of presenting concise and relevant information to avoid overloading students' thinking processes. The 60-second duration of Instagram Stories supports this by encouraging brief, focused explanations of grammar points.

2. Engagement Theory

This study also draws on the Engagement Theory developed by Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998), which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through relating, creating, and donating. The *Relate* component involves social interaction. Instagram stories facilitate this through DM, Q&A stickers, and comment features that allow students to interact with the teacher and peers. The *Create* component encourages students to produce content. Students were asked to design quizzes or example of grammar structures using story features. The *Donate* component involves sharing knowledge with others. Students could share their story posts with classmates, contributing to a collaborative learning environment. These features promote active engagement and motivation, which are essential for language learning.

3. Dual Coding Theory

Dual Coding Theory proposed by Paivio (2006) suggests that information is processed through two separate but interconnected channels: verbal and visual. When information is presented in both forms, comprehension and memory are enhanced. Lessons that include concrete information and vivid images are easier to understand and remember and using models, examples, and illustrations in teaching is highly recommended (Clark, 1991). This theory supports the use of Instagram Stories, which combine textual explanations with relevant images, diagrams, and animations. For example, conditional sentences were explained using charts and example sentences on different story slides, with visual cues such as arrows and highlights to direct attention to key elements. This combination of verbal and nonverbal elements can help EFL learners better understand and retain syntactic structures,

4. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have explored the usefulness of Instagram in language learning, particularly in improving grammar and vocabulary comprehension. The first one is a study by Al Arif (2020) that showed Instagram features likes Stories have huge potential in supporting English language learning as a foreign language. He observed how EFL students used various Instagram features, including Stories, posts, and IGTV, for self-directed learning. The results showed Instagram Stories were super effective in delivering basic grammar material due to the visual and interactive format. Infographics and short videos in Stories helped learners grasp grammar rules faster, while interactive features like polls and quizzes got students engaged and boosted their motivation.

The second research according to Al-Jarf (2019) Instagram can be powerful tool for improving English grammar skills among university students. The multimedia features like images, text, and audio made grammar rules stick better for university students. But what really made the difference was the interactive edge – features like polls, quizzes, and Q&A sessions allowed students to actively practice and receive instant feedback, leading to significant improvements in their grammar test scores compared to traditional learning methods. The results showed It is a clear that this kind of of interactive, multimedia approach can make language learning way more effective and engaging.

The third study. Smith and Brown's (2021) study, published in Journal of Language Learning and Technology, explored how teaches and students utilized Instagram Stories to create learning content. The research demonstrated that effective use of Instagram Stories enhanced grammar understanding due to the concise and visually engaging presentations of materials. Students are way more motivated when the learning is fun like when it is a quiz or a countdown and Instagram Stories are perfect for making learning social and collaborative – ideal for group projects and teaming up with friends.

The findings from the above research indicate that Instagram Stories are not just a social media platform, but also an effective learning tool. As Al Arif (2020) observed, features like IGTV, Stories, Polling, Quiz, and Q&A can be used to teach basic grammar. Al Jarf (2019) also states that learning grammar from Instagram is effective due to the combination of visual images and engaging text. Meanwhile, Smith & Brown (2021) researched how teachers and students can collaboratively create learning content using Instagram Stories for group projects.

To address the gap in these studies, this research aims to compare the effectiveness of Instagram Stories and conventional methods in teaching basic grammar, specifically the simple present tense, to non-English major students at an Islamic university. This study specifically utilizes the quiz feature on Instagram Stories, where the content is created and provided by the teacher, eliminating the need for students to create their own content.

RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design to examine the effect of Instagram Stories on EFL learners' syntactic competence. A mixed-methods approach was also applied by incorporating a questionnaire to explore students' perceptions. The experimental group received grammar instruction through Instagram Stories, while the control group received conventional classroom instruction.

2. Participants

The participants were 60 first-year EFL students at [Nama Universitas Islam] in Indonesia, aged 18–20 years. They were divided into two groups: 25 students in the experimental group and 25 students in the control group. The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their similar English proficiency level as indicated by their previous grammar test scores. All participants had access to smartphones and Instagram accounts.

3. Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study. First, a grammar test consisting of 30 multiple-choice and 10 essay questions was developed to measure students' syntactic accuracy and complexity. The test focused on basic syntactic structures such as simple, compound, and complex sentences, and clause formation. Second, a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from was used to measure

students' perceptions of engagement, motivation, and ease of use. Third, observation sheets and screenshots of Instagram Stories interactions were used as supporting da ta.

4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the grammar test and questionnaire were reviewed by two experts in language testing. A pilot test was conducted with 20 students outside the sample to examine the reliability of the instruments. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.87 for the grammar test and 0.89 for the questionnaire, indicating high internal consistency. For qualitative data, triangulation was applied by comparing questionnaire results with observation data.

5. Data Collection Procedure

The treatment was conducted over 6 weeks, with two 90-minute sessions per week. In the experimental group, grammar materials were delivered through Instagram Stories. Each story contained a short explanation, examples, and interactive quizzes or polls. Students were also asked to respond to questions via DM and comment features. In the control group, the same materials were taught using conventional lecture and textbook exercises. Both groups completed a pre-test before treatment and a post-test after treatment.

6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were calculated. To determine the difference between groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted manually using the t-test formula in Excel. A paired samples t-test was also used to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentage of each response.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Group	Definition	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (d)	Effect Size Interpretation
Experimental	During Treatment using Instagram Stories for the medium	55.3 (6.7)	78.6 (5.4)	12.45	0	1.45	Large
Control	During Treatment using Conventional teaching in the class	54.8 (7.1)	62.4 (6.9)	4.23	1	0.52	Moderate

As shown in Table 1, both groups showed improvement from pre-test to post-test. However, the experimental group demonstrated a greater increase. The mean score of the experimental group increased from 55.3 to 78.6, with a large effect size of 1.45. Meanwhile, the control group increased from 54.8 to 62.4, with a moderate effect size of 0.52. The t-value of 12.45 and p-value of 0.00 indicate that the improvement in the experimental group was statistically significant.

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three primary themes: engagement, motivation, and usability, which explained how Instagram Stories supported grammar learning.

Engagement

Most students reported that Instagram Stories made learning grammar more interesting and interactive. Features such as polls, quizzes, and Q&A stickers maintained their attention during the lessons. One student stated, "The quizzes challenged me and helped me remember rules better." Visual elements including images, diagrams, and short videos also helped students understand grammar concepts. As another student explained, "Diagrams and examples make it click – it is not just theory."

Motivation

Learning through Instagram Stories provided flexibility for students to learn independently. They could replay the stories within 24 hours to review the material. This autonomy increased their confidence and sense of control over their learning. The quiz features also created a sense of friendly competition among students. One student commented, "I can replay it whenever I want. If I don't understand, I can watch it again until I get it."

Usability

Students found Instagram Stories easy to use for learning because they were already familiar with the platform. One student noted, "I check Instagram every day, so learning through Stories feels easy." The intuitive interface of Instagram made the learning process feel natural and did not require additional training.

The quantitative results showed a large effect size for the experimental group, indicating that Instagram Stories significantly improved students' syntactic performance compared to conventional teaching. This finding is supported by the qualitative data. The themes of engagement, motivation, and usability explain why the treatment was effective. First, the interactive features of Instagram Stories increased student engagement. This aligns with Alharbi, who stated that higher student engagement can strengthen understanding of the material. Second, the flexibility and replay feature increased students' motivation to learn independently, which is consistent with Wang's finding that social media can enhance learner motivation. Third, the familiarity of students with Instagram reduced cognitive load and made the learning process more accessible. This supports Mayer's argument that visual and familiar platforms can facilitate comprehension and memory.

Overall, the findings of both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate that Instagram Stories can serve as an effective tool for teaching grammar to EFL students. The platform offers an engaging, interactive, and student-centered learning experience that fits the learning preferences of digital native students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Instagram Stories in improving EFL learners' syntactic competence. The results of this study had a significant positive effect on students' grammar performance. The experimental group that learned through Instagram Stories showed a greater improvement in post-test scores and a large effect size compared to the control group that used conventional teaching. The qualitative findings further revealed that students experienced higher engagement, motivation, and usability when learning grammar through Instagram Stories

Therefore, Instagram Stories can serve as an effective instructional medium for teaching grammar in EFL contexts. The success of this medium aligns with Multimedia Learning Theory, Engagement Theory, and Dual Coding Theory, which emphasize the importance of combining visual and verbal information, promoting active engagement, and facilitating memory retention. In addition, Instagram Stories provide flexibility to learn independently, allowing students to replay materials and review lessons at their own pace. In conclusion, integrating familiar social media platforms such as Instagram Stories into grammar instruction can create a more interactive and student-centered learning experience for digital native learners.

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