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**STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
THE USE OF INSTAGRAM IN ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE WRITING**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose** – This study examines university students’ perceptions and attitudes towards the use of Instagram in English language writing. Like other social networking sites (SNS), the design of Instagram promotes community-centeredness, and supports the dissemination of authentic content that creates opportunities for meaningful interactions among language learners.

**Methodology** – There were 101 participants of this study who participated in a descriptive English essay writing activity on Instagram, answered a set of questionnaire with 20 closed-ended items, and five open-ended questions about using Instagram for English language learning. Focus groups’ discussions with all of the respondents were held to elaborate the open-ended items. The closed-items were analysed quantitatively using mean scores, while the open-ended items were analysed both quantitatively (mean scores) and qualitatively (content analysis).

**Findings** – The results demonstrated students’ high positive perceptions and views towards using Instagram in improving their writing skills, but moderate attitudes.

**Significance** – Based on the more favourable responses, it is about time that language teachers implement the preeminent social media platform such as Instagram to create conducive learning environment that could boost students’ motivation in English language learning.

**Keywords:** Instagram, English language writing, language learning, mobile learning, university students, quantitative and qualitative data

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF INSTAGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE WRITING

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of technology facilitates the birth of fast-growing social media tools that are increasingly being used by students in social and academic settings. In academia, social networking sites (SNS) are deemed as valuable in language learning as their community-centred design supports the dissemination of authentic language, and encourage meaningful interactions beyond the classrooms. As students are ready for technological changes in learning (Manca & Ranieri, 2013), it is time that higher education (HE) institutions harness their potential to better serve the students' creative needs (Davis III, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & González Canché, 2015). At present, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular forms of SNS with a high rate of university students' demography (Shafie, Yaacob, & Singh, 2016); hence could be employed as mobile learning tools to positively impact language learning.

This study examines the lesser examined SNS of Instagram and its impact on Malaysian university students' English language writing skills. Instagram was launched in October 2010 and had quickly gained a million users in the first month. By April 2015, it had 300 million active users (Costill, 2014; Instagram, 2015); at a rate faster than any other popular social media including Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Blogs. While studies on Instagram are limited, studies on Facebook and Twitter on English language learning have flourished. SNS afford tremendous opportunities for language learning for both teachers and students (Aydin, 2014; Rios & Campos, 2015). They provide new ways for languages and cultures which rope students in for critical reflection in the process of meaning making (Chun, Smith, & Kern, 2016). Facebook and Twitter offer wide opportunities for English language learners to interact with native speakers and authentic materials (Shafie et al., 2016). Shih (2011; 2013) reported that the Facebook writing activities among Taiwanese EFL students have improved their language and generic

skills as well as strengthened peer-to-peer relationships. Their writings were better in terms of organisation, vocabulary, grammar and structure. The interactions about students' writing on SNS such as Facebook and Ning promoted some extent of collaborative and cooperative learning (Toetenel, 2014). In relation to this, Novakovich (2015) similarly reported based on a quasi-experimental study that blogs produced a higher quality of students' writing and critical peer comments, compared to traditional methods. Essentially, tweeting has contributed to the development of a new literacy practice, i.e. Twitteracy, that supports both formal and informal learning (Li & Greenhow, 2015).

In an earlier study, Hamat et al. (2012) reported that SNS have not fully penetrated the HE institutions in Malaysia. However, more recent studies on social media and language learning argued otherwise; that Malaysian university students are active users of Facebook and demonstrated positive attitudes towards the use of Facebook in second language (L2) learning environment (Adi Kasuma, 2017; Shafie et al., 2016). Furthermore, Facebook promotes the construction of English language knowledge through community-based discussions that could develop students' language ability. This study would thus like to explore the possibilities of expanding other SNS into the paradigm of English language learning in Malaysia. It employs Instagram as an informal, popular, and fun medium, that is essentially mobile. The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine students' attitudes towards Instagram in English language learning.
2. To identify students' perceptions of Instagram as an English language learning platform.
3. To analyse students' perceptions about the English language descriptive writing activities on Instagram.

The research questions are as follow:

1. What are students' attitudes towards using Instagram in English language learning?
2. How do students perceive Instagram as an English language learning platform?
3. How do students perceive the English language descriptive writing activities on Instagram?

The terms ‘perceptions’ and ‘attitudes’ used in this study are viewed as two separate constructs as ‘attitudes’ measures the students’ reactions to the Instagram writing activity, while ‘perceptions’ measures the way they view and interpret the activity in relation to English language learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesises the previous literature that have been presented in the field of social media and language learning; in relation to English language learning, writing skills, and mobile learning.

### Mobile Learning on Social Media

Mobile learning takes place in learning environments and spaces that take into account the mobility of technology, learners, and learning (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010). It is wireless, where the digital devices and technology (Gafni & Deri, 2012) produced for the public are used by learners to participate in education (Traxler, 2007). Mobile learning is considered to be a new concept covering a variety of applications, learning process and learning method (Barhoumi & Rossi, 2013). At present, educational mobile technology is a common occurrence for online instructions in global universities, thus, it is evident that students relied on mobile technology (e.g. smartphones, tablets) and applications (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) for educational and social happenings (Jimoyiannis et al., 2013; Stockwell, 2008). In the current climate of technological progression, social media are essential platforms for mobile learning in a range of fields. Many studies that have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of Facebook and Twitter in language learning, to the extent that the term ‘Twitteracy’ was coined to show the impact of Twitter on literacy (Aydin, 2014; Buga, Căpeneacă, Chirasnel, & Popa, 2014; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012).

These studies have presented various aspects of social media in language learning, and the positives include: Facebook’s ability in developing both content and language knowledge among EFL students (Eren, 2012; Shih, 2011, 2013); Facebook’s ability in forging good relationship between students-students and students-

teachers (Aydin, 2014; Ekoc, 2014), the construction of knowledge on Facebook (Idris & Ghani, 2012), Facebook's ability in promoting incidental learning of language skills (Adi Kasuma, 2017; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), and the opportunities afforded by Facebook for language teachers (Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010).

The negative aspects of social media in language learning include: extra tasks for teachers who have to monitor the suitability of language and content (Shih, 2011, 2013); the possibility of students learning inaccurate language productions in online environment (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010); and privacy issues (Gettman & Cortijo, 2015; Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

It is based on the premise that social media offers a myriad of advantages to language learning that this study proposes Instagram to develop students' English language writing. This mobile learning facility is hoped to make learning more effective and motivating for the students. As students are highly empowered by their digital devices, it is hoped that they will become more involved and active in incorporating Instagram in language learning. Although students are ready for technological change to happen, many classroom teaching are still characterised by teacher-centred approaches and chalk-and-talk drill method (Ministry of Education, 2003).

In employing social media into learning, teachers need to contextualised their usage to match students' needs and learning abilities, as well as the set curriculums (Kevin & NcNergney, 1999). In this study, the main concern in to improve students' English language descriptive writing on Instagram. Instagram is a mobile application that allows users to capture and share images and videos with followers (Instagram, 2015). It is the fastest-growing application which is currently popular for captioned creative pictures and 1-minute videos. Knight-McCord et al., (2016) reported Instagram as the most used SNS, followed by Snapchat and Facebook. eBizMBA (2016) found Instagram as the eight most visited SNS worldwide, and still continues to innovate by introducing new features. Since May 2016, Instagram Stories that features live video broadcasting was added, and can be viewed for 24 hours. It is popular among teenagers and online businesses. Another feature is the Momentary Messages that deletes the images or videos sent after it has been viewed by the receivers. Instagram is popular among university

students' demographic from the ages of 19-25 years old. The SNS allows them to express thoughts and feelings in a personal space, where pictures and videos can be accompanied by texts. Instagram users usually log onto the system on a daily basis.

Unlike Facebook, not many academic studies have been conducted on Instagram, Al-Ali (2014) found that Instagram was used as a production for a holiday project and two writing activities in ESL classes. The results showed that even though the students were not as enthusiastic with the initiative at first, they gradually welcomed the idea when encouraged to be creative in completing the writing activities.

### **English Language Learning and Mobile Learning**

The current study examines the use of Instagram for English language writing among Malaysian university students. English language is the second official language of Malaysia. Its mastery is highly required for academic and career advancement. Generally, there are four language skills that are centralised; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Reading and listening are considered as receptive skills where students receive information, but writing and speaking require students' production of language (Harmer, 2007), and are often challenging. Nevertheless, these skills are interdependent and are integrated elements of language (Su, 2007). Jalaludin and Bakar (2009) found that Malaysian students found the uncomfortable environment they lived in discouraged their speaking and writing development. With the progression of technology, digital literacy and online communication are another sets of skills that require attention in the language classrooms. For English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, writing is much more difficult, complex and challenging to master than speaking, as it consists of handwriting, spelling, flow, and punctuations, as well as the need to generate and organise ideas into comprehensible texts (Myles, 2002; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Harmer, 2007; Alsamadani, 2010; Adas & Bakir, 2013). For example, a group of ESL students faced writing problems which overwhelmed and stressed them out when they were asked to sit for writing assessments (Fadda, 2012).

There are four major types of essays; narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive. This study focuses mainly on descriptive

essay where students need to communicate deeper meanings in their writings. Students need to be able to express their feelings and thoughts accurately in written form, and communicate their ideas effectively to convey their intention. Essay writings require writers' creativity to employ suitable adjectives in their descriptions of people, events, and things for an impactful writing. The challenging nature of a writing in a different language will perhaps be reduced by having a tool to ease the process (Alsaleem, 2013). In the case of this study, Instagram is chosen as the writing medium so as to exploit its benefits. The use of technological tools in previous studies have positively impacted the language classrooms especially in HE institutions (Ekoc, 2014; Eren, 2012; R.-C. Shih, 2011). As Instagram develops both descriptive language, and cultural awareness and competence (Lomicka and Lord, 2009), it is hoped that it motivates students to practice English language writings both formally and informally.

## METHODOLOGY

This section presents the participants, instruments, and procedure of the study.

### Participants

The participants of this study were 101 undergraduate students at one of the research universities in Malaysia. The students were enrolled in three levels of English language courses which are LMT100 Preparatory English, LSP300 Academic English, and LSP401 General English. Majority of the participants are from the Arts streams with MUET Band 3 and 4. All respondents were asked to participate in a descriptive essay writing activity on Instagram before they answered the questionnaire and contributed in the focus groups' discussions. Those students were expected to give their views on writing using Instagram as a tool for mobile learning.

### Instruments

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to address the research questions of this study. The combination of these data will permit a more thorough analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) as well as a triangulation of findings.

A set of questionnaires with 20 closed-ended items were distributed to 101 students during class time. The questionnaire was adapted based on two existing studies by ElsayyedSanad (2016) and Yunus et al. (2012), who had examined the suitability of Facebook as an educational learning tool, and writing platform. The adapted items were tested for its reliability using the Cronbach's Alpha Test. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient that is closer to 1.0 indicates greater internal consistency of the items (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). In this case, the coefficient value of 0.898 is shows the validity and reliability of the items. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections: A) Personal Background; B) Instagram Usage; Ci) Attitudes towards Instagram, Cii) Perceptions of using Instagram for English language learning, Ciii) Perceptions of Writing Activities on Instagram; and D) Open-ended items. The items in Section C were formed with a 4-point Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree). The items are presented in the finding section. The data were analysed quantitatively on SPSS.

### **Procedure**

There were two stages to the data collection procedure. First, the students were instructed to participate in a descriptive writing activity on Instagram on the topic of "The Most Valuable Gift". The writing activity aimed to expose students to a mobile learning experience through a popular and familiar social media. In terms of language learning, the activity trained students to be more descriptive and creative in their elaborations of the pictures of people, places, and objects. Second, all of the students answered a set of questionnaires with 20 closed-ended items, and five open-ended questions. The open-ended items were further elaborated in focus groups' discussions with all 101 participants.

The data contributed to the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. The quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to corroborate and support the findings and address the research questions of this study.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings are presented in three main sections; a) Participants' demography, b) Quantitative findings, and c) Qualitative findings.

### a) Participants' Demography

The 101 respondents consisted of 70 percent female and 30 percent male. All of them reported that they have at least one Instagram account. The participants were between the ages of 19-26, with a majority of 21-22 years old (84 percent). Many of the participants were of Malay descent (80 percent), followed by 14 percent Chinese, and 1 percent Indian students. The students were enrolled in five English language proficiency courses, i.e. LMT00 Preparatory English (20 percent), LSP300 Academic English (37 percent), and LSP400 General English (43 percent).

About 55 percent have been using Instagram for 0-2 years; while another 40 percent have had it for 3-5 years, and 4 percent have used it for 6-8 years. The frequency of the students to access Instagram per day is shown in Table 1:

Table 1

#### *Students' Frequency of Daily Access onto Instagram*

Daily Usage	Frequency	Percent (%)
0 – 3 times	33	32.7
4 – 6 times	30	29.7
More than 7 times	38	37.6
Total	101	100.0

From the statistics, it is evident that the participants were familiar with Instagram and that they used it frequently. Thus, the issues such as technical abilities and knowledge about the tools are alleviated.

### b) Quantitative Findings from The Closed-Ended Items

The quantitative findings present the data from the close-ended items of the questionnaire in relation to the students' attitudes and perceptions towards using Instagram for English language writing activities. In answering the research questions, the items for each section of Attitudes, Perceptions of English Language Learning (Perceptions 1), and Perceptions of Writing Activities on Instagram (Perceptions 2) are grouped together, and statistically analysed using mean scores, based on Konting (2004) levels of mean scores

analysis (Table 2). The students' attitudes, perceptions, and views will be considered as low, mediocre, or high if they have the following values:

Table 2

*The Level of Mean Score Analysis*

Mean Score	Level
0 – 1.33	Low
1.34 – 2.66	Mediocre
2.67 – 4.00	High

Table 3 illustrates the mean scores for each research question and their levels of mean score analysis.

Table 3

*The Levels of Students' Attitudes and Perceptions towards Using Instagram for English learning*

Research Question	Mean	SD	Level
RQ1 (Attitudes)	2.65	.51	Mediocre
RQ2 (Perceptions 1)	3.05	.44	High
RQ3 (Perceptions 2)	2.81	.50	High
Overall			High

Table 3 shows that the students demonstrated mediocre attitudes, but had high positive perceptions and views towards using Instagram for English language writing. The findings for each research question are further elaborated below.

*Research Question 1: What are students' attitudes towards using Instagram in English language learning?*

Table 3 shows that the respondents' attitudes towards Instagram for English language learning as mediocre. There are eight items that examine attitudes. A majority of the participants (75 percent) agreed

that Instagram is part of their everyday activities, but 57 percent were not proud to tell people that they were on Instagram. Only 33 percent of the students preferred to use Instagram over face-to-face lessons; which strongly suggests that classroom learning is the backbone of education, and SNS are good supplementary tools. Similar findings were presented by the interview participants in Adi Kasuma (2017) who stated that they still preferred face-to-face classroom learning compared to Facebook learning. Essentially, the integration of social media technology is not to replace traditional methods, but simply to enhance the process of teaching and learning. In this sense, the blended learning environment for English language activities might be the best options for teachers and students (Shih, 2011, 2013).

Many of the students agreed that Instagram improves their language proficiency (75 percent), and enhances their communication with teachers and friends (70 percent). Instagram is also deemed as a convenient tool for classroom discussions where 62 percent agreed to this statement. The community-centred design of SNS that encourages interactions naturally promotes collaboration and cooperation between users (Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014). The mobility of the platforms that supports synchronous and asynchronous interactions may further enhanced students' learning engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008).

In relation to the descriptive essay writing activity on Instagram, 82 percent of the students reported that their overall experience with Instagram is highly positive. This indicates that while students might have a certain extent of reservations in using social media in learning, they did not deny the effectiveness of the tools in enriching their language learning experience.

*Research Question 2: How do students perceive Instagram as an English language learning platform?*

Table 3 shows that the respondents' perceptions towards Instagram for English language learning as high. There are 7 items that measure perceptions. A high majority of 90 and 91 percent of respondents agreed that Instagram can be used for social and educational purposes; where it acts as a virtual storytelling platform. On Instagram, students have an immediate community of authentic

audience who could access their writing products, which might boost motivation and self-worth. The students (85 percent) also highlighted that Instagram is a good platform for teachers-students' interactions outside of the school hours. In many studies of distance learning, students who get the opportunities to be connected with friends, teachers, and campus on Facebook, felt a sense of belonging which improved their learning motivation (Lim, 2010). In the case of this study, the teachers-students' interactions on social media outside of the school hours could bridge the gap between formal and informal learning faced by many HE institutions (Reinhardt & Ryu, 2013). Essentially, a big percentage of 94 percent saw Instagram as convenient where 84 percent agreed that it is easier to write in the caption box, and post pictures and videos in the Instagram. This shows that there are specific functions of Instagram as a SNS that matches the students' preferences, hence could be taken into consideration by language teachers.

*Research Question 3: How do students perceive the English language descriptive writing activities on Instagram?*

Table 3 shows that the respondents' perceptions towards activities on Instagram for English language writing as high. There are five items of measurement. In general, a majority of the participants (61-79 percent) had positive perceptions about doing activities on Instagram for English language writing. However, these percentages are slightly lower than the numbers in Research Question 2 (Students' perceptions of using Instagram for English language learning). Seventy-nine percent of the students reported that they usually wrote captions on Instagram that described the photos they share, and believed that they could improve essay writing skills through Instagram. However, a lower percentage of 61 percent of respondents loved adding captions to their photos on Instagram like a daily journal writing or microblogging. Seventy-one percent saw Instagram as a suitable platform to post writing assignments like short stories and essays, while 66 percent reported Instagram's suitability for peer review or comments of classmates' writing assignments. The findings in this section could thus be seen in relation to previous studies that have been conducted on writing on Facebook, where Facebook supports the development of language skills and content knowledge, as well as makes peer review process more convenient and effective ( Shih, 2011, 2013). Essentially however, it has to be underlined that the use of SNS such as Instagram is not to replace

traditional classroom learning, but as a supplement to cater to students' learning preferences.

### a) **Qualitative Findings from The Open-Ended Items**

There are five questions asked in the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, and the participants' responses were further discussed in focus groups' interactions. Their responses were analysed thematically.

#### *i. Challenges in using Instagram as a mobile tool for language learning (Research questions 2, 3)*

There are three main challenges that students faced when using Instagram as a mobile learning tool. First, the students were concerned with being distracted while attempting tasks on Instagram. Many followed celebrities' pages and claimed that at times, they were unaware that they had spent so much time browsing through the posts. The students also felt that they have to focus more on sharing entertaining, creative pictures, rather than focusing on the caption (i.e. the language aspect), as they want people to appreciate their posts. They thus spent more time editing their photos to attract readers into liking, commenting, and sharing their posts.

R32: Instagram is an image-based app. Some people might use it to avoid lengthy texts to start with, and captions are not read if the images are not entertaining.

R49: Mostly nowadays, people use Instagram to follow celebrities and buy [online shopping].

R65: Probably students like me who use Instagram for entertainment or social purposes rather than education so I'll be easily distracted.

The second challenge relates to language. The students felt threatened to write in English language, fearing that they would be criticised for their poor grammar or mistakes. The form-focused instruction that is commonplace in Malaysian institutions have thus produced grammar-conscious students (Che Musa, Koo, & Azman, 2012)musa. While this is commendable to a certain extent, many students find it difficult to practically use the target language in

spoken and written interactions. Several respondents acknowledged their confidence issues which affect their writing performance, especially when it will be read by the Instagram communities. They reported that it was difficult to identify their mistakes, and complete online writing tasks. Consequently, they needed more time to check their essays multiple times before sharing them online. In addressing this issue, they relied a lot on Google Translate; which could be effective in the combination of digital and traditional literacy (Chun et al., 2016). Some students saw that internet language is harmful to language development as there are too many inaccurate forms and structures including short forms, e.g. *lol* (*laugh out loud*), *nvm* (*nevermind*), and *ttyl* (*talk to you later*).

R24: I lack confident to write in English especially an essay and let others read it.

R48: I might get marked by other people for having bad grammar, vocabulary, or other things related to language.

R85: The language used was not that accurate in terms of sentence structure.

The third and one of the most important issues of social media and academia is privacy matters. The students felt reluctant to share pictures and posts with strangers, and only want to connect with people they knew. They commonly changed their Instagram setting to private so that their posts are not exposed to others. They felt the need to be careful with their words as people might misconstrue their intention. A few students stated that they did not want their teachers to know what they were doing online; a finding that was similarly articulated by participants in Gettman and Cortijo (2015) and Teclehaimanot and Hickman's (2011) studies who were bothered by their faculty's presence in their personal Facebook space. Two students felt strongly that Instagram should remain social, thus, it would be better if teachers and students create new accounts to cater to educational activities.

R51. Need privacy, and other students can copy our assignments if we post them on social media.

R74: Teachers can stalk us and we have to be careful of what we want to express in it.

R78: The challenge is that I open my private life to strangers. It's not good as I usually only befriend the close ones.

ii. *How does Instagram help in writing? (Research question 3)*

In general, the students were positive that Instagram is an important medium that improves their writing skills, as it encourages their expressions of thoughts and feelings in words, based on pictures and short videos. They were at liberty to write based on selected images and videos. Furthermore, they added to their linguistic repertoire by reading others' writings and trying to make sense of them. It is from this experience that students learn constructively from more knowledgeable others based on authentic content (Aydin, 2014). They credited Instagram for their continuous English writing activities; which substantiates a previous study's argument that social media could promote online skills transfer and life-long learning (Lee, 2010).

R7: Captions can be used to describe an event or information regarding the image or just rants about daily life. Either way it helps encourage expressing thoughts [into] words.

R30: I copy [other people's] captions. Then I will try to understand and translate their writing. From here I improve my English.

Essentially, Instagram taught the students to repeatedly check their writings to make sure they have the correct grammar and appropriate sentence structures. They were extra cautious with spellings, sentence structures, and vocabulary to spare from hurting other people's feelings, and bordering on sensitive issues. These practices have subconsciously increased their vocabulary.

R26: I think Instagram can help me in improving my English skills [by] writing captions, building sentences, checking my grammar mistakes before posting.

R34: Instagram gives me new vocabulary that I need to know and learn. I can use my vocabulary in my essays.

Finally, the students viewed the comments they received from their posts as constructive feedback that could assist their language learning. The moral support they received from teachers, friends and families boosted their learning confidence and desire. Chokwe (2015) agreed that students were motivated to improve when they received constructive feedback in the context of English language learning.

R35: Instagram can help my writing such as that people comment for positive[ly] [for me to] improve my writing. Sometimes they will correct if I was wrong.

R87: When I post pictures and captions on Instagram, if there are grammar mistakes, my friends will correct me. Plus, if I post it, I become more [courageous] to speak or write in English on social media.

iii. *The steps taken before essays were posted on Instagram. (Research question 1)*

There are several steps that the students follow before posting on Instagram. First, many of the students took time to search for suitable photos and edit them to get more *likes*. They preferred to relate their captions to the photos to give a more meaningful effect towards the readers. They usually edited the pictures to become attractive as users tended to only read captions if the pictures attracted them. Second, the element of hashtags was another fun element of Instagram that the students thought about in their writings.

Third, they brainstormed and drafted their ideas on paper or digitally, before attempting the actual writing. A few others researched the topics given before attempting the writing process. They refrained from writing about sensitive issues that could hurt other people's feelings, and commonly thought about the positive and negative impacts of their writings to the readers. Once written, they edited their essays several times to identify language errors, e.g. spelling, sentence structure, and grammar. Google Translate and dictionaries were always referred to, in coming up with fancy vocabulary and improving comprehension. They made certain that their captions were linguistically correct and written beautifully to be impressive.

R4: Check [if] my writing is [giving] negative or positive impact to Instagram users who read my post.

R21: Choose a pic, have a title or topic, think back of my memories about this topic, check my grammar and sentences, read it again, post.

R24: Draft it on a note application, search google to check appropriate words, paste it into description box [on Instagram].

iv. *How do you feel about using Instagram as part of your English classes? (Research questions 1, 2, and 3)*

The focus groups' discussions demonstrated that almost all of the participants were positive of the writing activity on Instagram. At the start of the activity, many were shy and awkward as they did not have any experience of using social media educationally. As the activity progressed, they felt more motivated to write more on Instagram. Several students saw Instagram as a good platform for introverts as they will feel more comfortable sharing their essays with their peers. These findings may be seen in relation to studies on pedagogical lurkers (Chiu, 2009; Nonnecke, Andrews, & Preece, 2006), whereby it was found that students tended to lurk on social media at first to learn from their friends' writings. Once they felt more comfortable with the environment and content, they will start contributing more and more to the online community. They usually lurked due to low confidence and poor online communication skills (Shafie et al., 2016).

Students who claimed to be introverts were eager to share experiences, stories and pictures through their writings to exchange ideas and get to know other students. They wanted to share their daily occurrences and transformed Instagram into a daily journal to update friends, families, teachers and course mates with their lives. This activity, they believed could improve their English writing skills, enhance communicative abilities and boost confidence to use more English every day. Thus, while social media are usually employed for social and recreational purposes (Gettman & Cortijo, 2015), the participants in this study were not reluctant to combine the social activities with language learning. This emphasises Instagram could as a valuable academic tool.

R2: At first I feel embarrassed, I keep thinking about how my followers will react from the posts, but I think it actually builds my confidence. I don't have to be fake [of] my own capability.

R9: [At] first I feel shy because I worry about my English grammar, [and] other people can see and read, but it [is] positive because I can improve my writing.

Nevertheless, a small number of students reported to disliking Instagram as part of educational activities, to maintain their privacy.

They believed that social media should stay recreational as academic use of it is also time consuming.

R16: I do not agree because Instagram is like my diary. I won't let strangers read my diary.

R17: I do not like it. It feels awkward and it feels like my privacy is a bit violated.

Perhaps, a private group, a more secure privacy setting, and structured lessons would alleviate all of these concerns; as Instagram has the potential to create a creative and fun learning environment in the digital era.

v. *What other language activities can be implemented on Instagram? (Research question 2)*

The students were creative in suggesting other language activities on Instagram. These include: 1-week 1-sentence photo description activity, creative writing, short videos to introduce self for job interviews, quizzes, individual oral presentations using live videos, analysing and guessing other's photos and comments, story writing by completing each other's sentences, discussions, listening activities using videos, reading quality essays, vocabulary-enhancing activities, songs-related activities, and translation activities. These suggestions better informed teachers of the activities that the students preferred in learning language on Instagram.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall feedback given by the respondents were mostly positive. Instagram offers many advantages; one of it is its mobility and accessibility through smartphones that makes it suitable for continuous language exposure (Al-Ali, 2014). Furthermore, it contextualises visual data and elements that aid learning in language classrooms, and promote socially-connected community of learners who communicate and socialise with each other beyond their classrooms' interactions. The findings of this study share comparable results with research of similar nature, particularly on Facebook in language learning (Adi Kasuma, 2017; Buga et al., 2014; Kabilan et al., 2010), where students had high positive perceptions towards

Facebook as a learning environment, and favourable attitudes towards learning on Facebook. Relatedly, the students in Yunus et al. (2012) were positive that Facebook improved their writing skills as they went through the process of brainstorming ideas, before attempting writing.

Two issues that kept being repeated in the data are of privacy settings and grammar learning. First, some of the respondents took the matter of privacy on Instagram seriously as they did not want their lives to be exposed to strangers. Gettman and Cortijo (2015) found that the students had relatively negative attitudes towards the instructor's use of Facebook for academic purposes. This resistance was due to several reasons; Facebook is for social rather than educational use, interactions with professors on Facebook might be inappropriate, and the possible problems in professor-student relationships. Similarly, besides privacy issues, the students' in Wang et al. (2012), argued Facebook's limitation as an online educational tool as it did not support the uploading of various format files, and unstructured and unorganised discussions. Therefore, in addressing this matter, it is necessary that students create new Instagram accounts solely for educational purposes, that should only be made accessible by their fellow classmates and teachers. This keeps students' writing products and language development secure among the specific communities.

Second, many Malaysian students were over-concerned with their grammar mistakes when writing in the English language, which increase their anxiety and lower their confidence (Che Musa et al., 2012). Consequently, they felt pressured into writing in the target language on Instagram, which decreased language learning opportunities. The formal English classrooms often centralise rote grammar learning that leads to students associating English language with grammar. Undeniably, grammar is integral in English language, but following the social constructivist approach (Chartrand, 2012), language should be learned within socially-mediated environment where students are exposed to authentic use of the target language, and given the occasions to construct and interact in the L2. Therefore, the integration of Instagram into the language classrooms would allow teachers to promote language learning by situating the learners in a supportive peer community who has ample opportunities to read, receive, listen, watch, and

produce authentic English language. Students must be reminded that English language learning is not all about grammar and only when they start using it that they will develop their skills as well as confidence. Accordingly, Jalaludin and Bakar (2009) reported that Malaysian students were uncomfortable using English language especially to write and speak, as the environment did not promote its usage. However, as found from the data of this study and previous research, students will contribute more to the online communities once they are comfortable with the environment and learn from other's contribution (Chiu, 2009).

Future research in this field might want to extend the period of writing activity to 10 to 15 weeks for more comprehensive results, as well as taking into considerations the suggested language activities by the students.

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