

Research Article

Instagram in ELT Platform (2015-2025): A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis of Pedagogical Affordances, Edu-Influencer Practices, and Student Outcome Evidence

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesizes 50 peer-reviewed studies (2015–2025) on Instagram in English Language Teaching (ELT), examining platform affordances, edu-influencer practices, and evidence for learner outcomes. Searches across major databases followed PRISMA procedures; studies were coded for design, target skills, and assessment. Findings indicate consistent motivational benefits and strong affordances for microlearning, multimodality, and peer feedback, with the most promising results in vocabulary learning and writing practice. However, only a minority of studies used robust pre/post assessments, and longitudinal evidence remains scarce. Influential English-teaching accounts often combine concise instruction, storytelling, and community interaction, yet pedagogical depth and credibility vary, and engagement metrics (likes/followers) are poor proxies for learning. Overall, Instagram can enhance input and autonomy when tasks are intentionally designed and aligned with outcomes; effects on achievement are promising but mixed. According to the findings, it is recommended: (1) adopting standardized assessments and, where feasible, reporting effect sizes; (2) strengthening teacher-guided designs that scaffold active production; and (3) instituting ethical, transparency-oriented practices for edu-influencers. The review clarifies where Instagram meaningfully supports ELT and where claims exceed current evidence, outlining priorities for rigorous future research.

Introduction

In recent years, Instagram has emerged as a powerful digital platform with increasing relevance in educational contexts, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT). With its multimodal affordances—images, videos, stories, reels, and live broadcasts—Instagram allows for informal, visual, and interactive learning experiences that are distinct from traditional classroom practices. English educators and learners across the globe are increasingly turning to this platform to supplement their pedagogical practices and language learning efforts. As a result, Instagram has become not only a space for language exposure but also a site of professional networking, content creation, and identity negotiation among both teachers and students.

Earlier research on other social media platforms, particularly Twitter, also highlighted potential for professional learning and student engagement (Carpenter et al., 2017; Colwell & Hutchison, 2018; Gleason & Manca, 2020; Ross et al., 2015), laying the groundwork for Instagram's adoption in ELT. Learners' reflections on Twitter similarly showed benefits for language practice and pronunciation (Azlan & Yunus, 2020; Enasaroh et al., 2022; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016).

Amid this growing adoption, a new type of digital educator has emerged: the edu-influencer. These are individuals who blend pedagogical content with personal branding, often leveraging their follower base to gain visibility, sponsorship, or even educational authority. Although a number of studies have examined the communicative strategies and digital presence of such figures, relatively little attention has been paid to the broader pedagogical impact of their practices—

especially regarding measurable student learning outcomes.

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of whether Instagram-mediated learning tasks translate into measurable academic gains. While prior studies frequently emphasize benefits such as enhanced motivation, increased engagement, and greater learner autonomy, relatively few employ standardized outcomes, pre-/post-test measures, or longitudinal designs. Questions about whether Instagram-based instruction leads to improved vocabulary acquisition, writing fluency, pronunciation, or sustained language retention remain largely unanswered. A systematic synthesis that weighs Instagram's pedagogical promise against achievement evidence is therefore overdue.

This review contributes to the field by (1) mapping Instagram's pedagogical affordances against established ELT frameworks, (2) characterizing edu-influencer practices with attention to credibility and ethics, and (3) aggregating evidence for student learning outcomes with attention to methodological quality and assessment rigor. The analysis provides not only a descriptive account of what Instagram affords as an instructional tool but also a critical appraisal of the depth and reliability of claims regarding its impact. The review concludes with actionable recommendations for researchers, teachers, and edu-influencers.

This study is guided by four research questions:

1. Which Instagram affordances align with effective ELT design?
2. What practices characterize influential ELT accounts, and how pedagogically sound are they?

3. What is the strength and quality of evidence for learning outcomes (vocabulary, writing, pronunciation/speaking)?

4. How authentic are engagement metrics, and how well do they reflect learning processes?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of how Instagram functions not just as a social or promotional tool, but as a potentially transformative educational environment. The review also seeks to map out future pathways for empirical research, especially those that measure the actual impact of Instagram on student performance in language learning.

Review of Literature

Over the past decade, Instagram has increasingly been recognized as a versatile digital tool in English Language Teaching (ELT). With its multimodal nature, global accessibility, and learner-friendly interface, Instagram aligns well with modern pedagogical frameworks. This section synthesizes findings from 50 empirical studies conducted between 2015 and 2025 to evaluate Instagram's pedagogical utility, the instructional value of edu-influencers, and the platform's effects on student outcomes.

1. Pedagogical affordances and learning theories

A substantial body of research affirms Instagram's compatibility with learner-centered and constructivist pedagogies. Visual elements, interactive features such as polls and quizzes, and the asynchronous flexibility of posting and commenting create an environment conducive to collaborative and personalized learning. For instance, Rizqiana (2024) observed that individual learners using Instagram for autonomous pronunciation

practice, developed better pronunciation in comparison with traditional methods. Similarly, Váscónez et al. (2022) highlighted the platform's capacity to deliver bite-sized grammar lessons through created posters and videos improving learners' syntactic awareness without cognitive overload. Jiang and Zhao (2025) found that integrating Instagram supplementary resources into classroom helped learners improve their vocabulary in immediate and delayed posttests.

Pronunciation and listening have also benefited from Instagram's affordances. According to Lee (2023), key features like multimodality, mobility, instantaneous participation, and interactivity facilitates informal language learning especially related to phonological awareness and fluency. Collectively, these studies suggest that Instagram's multimodal affordances can meaningfully support input, output, and interaction, aligning with sociocultural, constructivist, and even connectivist learning theories.

2. Edu-influencers: Relatability versus pedagogical depth

Alongside these affordances, the literature documents the rise of edu-influencers—content creators who combine language instruction with personal branding. Carpenter, et al. (2023) noted that while influencer content attracted high engagement, its educational effectiveness varied widely. Some adopted evidence-based strategies such as spaced repetition and scaffolding, while others emphasized entertainment and aesthetics over instructional quality. Nonetheless, learners often perceived influencer-led content as more relatable, accessible, and timely than traditional classroom instruction. According to Safitri and Tari (2025) students were more

likely to practice English voluntarily when content was produced by charismatic figures whose tone and pace felt personalized.

Their findings highlight the blurred boundaries of authority and expertise in digital education. Learners' preference for influencer-led instruction underscores the growing demand for authenticity, yet it also raises questions about credibility, curriculum alignment, and the potential commercialization of language education. As Taddeo (2023) observed, edu-influencer content may increase participation but not always translate into measurable learning. Broader research on Influencer authority highlights similar risks of visibility without pedagogical depth (Casaló et al., 2020; Pöyry et al., 2025).

3. Evidence on student outcomes

The reviewed studies also examined Instagram's impact on student outcomes, with mixed results. While engagement and motivation were consistently high, measurable improvements in academic performance were less consistent. Azlan and Yunus (2020) highlighted potential of Instagram activities in improving vocabulary, whereas Luaran et al. (2025) found no improvement in learners' writing proficiency.

Moreover, multiple studies questioned the reliability of likes, comments, and follower counts as proxies for learning. Duha et al., (2025) emphasized the need for more rigorous assessment tools to measure genuine language development, advocating mixed-methods approaches that combine platform analytics with standardized proficiency testing.

Quantitative evidence was limited: over 56% of the studies reviewed relied on qualitative designs—interviews, focus groups, case studies—often with small sample sizes.

While these approaches offered valuable insights into learner perceptions, they lacked generalizability or causal inference. Only a handful, such as Erarslan A. (2019) employed pre- and post-tests triangulated with interview data. The majority relied on single-timepoint data, constraining the ability to evaluate sustained language development.

Importantly, skill focus varied. Vocabulary and grammar received the most attention, while academic writing and reading comprehension were underrepresented. Manullang and Katemba (2023) for example, explored effectiveness of using Instagram in improving writing finding the potential of this tool in improving high school students' writing. By contrast, Lukmana and Priyatmojo (2025) demonstrated improvement in learners' prosodic control for pronunciation. This fragmentation illustrates both the promise and the limitations of current evidence.

4. Cultural and contextual considerations

Another underexplored dimension is the cultural and institutional context of Instagram use. While most research originated in Iran, Turkey, the United States, and the UK, contributions from under-resourced contexts were scarce. Issues such as digital equity, access to devices, and local curricular alignment have not been systematically addressed. For example, Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018) briefly acknowledged that female learners in conservative societies may engage differently with visual content, but this observation was not further explored.

The lack of cross-cultural perspectives limits our understanding of how Instagram-mediated ELT operates across diverse settings. Moreover, few studies examined how informal learning on Instagram integrates with formal educational systems. Questions of

curricular alignment, teacher assessment practices, and institutional policies remain largely absent, leaving a gap in understanding how Instagram might sustainably function as part of blended learning environments.

5. Summary of the literature

The reviewed literature confirms Instagram's strong potential for fostering motivation, multimodal literacy, and informal learning engagement. However, methodological limitations persist: reliance on small-N qualitative designs, inconsistent assessment tools, and lack of longitudinal research reduce the strength of claims about sustained learning. Inconsistency in defining engagement, variability in targeted skills, and uneven attention to sociocultural contexts further complicate cross-study comparisons.

In sum, Instagram emerges as a promising but uneven tool in ELT. While learners respond positively to its interactive and relatable content, particularly when produced by edu-influencers, robust evidence of language achievement remains fragmented. This tension underscores the need for systematic reviews and more rigorous empirical research—precisely the gap the present study seeks to address. While recent reviews have catalogued Instagram's role in language learning (Nasution, 2023; Tayari Ashtiani et al., 2024), they did not integrate edu-influencer practices or systematically compare methodological quality, which this review aims to extend.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodological procedures employed in conducting this systematic review of Instagram as an English Language Teaching (ELT) platform. The study synthesizes findings from fifty empirical and theoretical studies published between 2015 and 2025. The methodology follows a structured approach consistent with guidelines for systematic reviews in education and applied linguistics, and it is presented in accordance with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) standards.

1. Search strategy

The search for relevant studies was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Searches were completed in June 2025. Keywords and Boolean operators were combined to capture relevant publications, including: “Instagram AND English language teaching,” “social media AND ELT,” “Instagram AND ESL,” “language learning outcomes AND Instagram,” and “edu-influencer AND language education”

Filters were applied to restrict results to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. Grey literature, conference abstracts, and non-peer-reviewed reports were excluded. Reference lists of included articles were also screened to capture additional studies through backward citation tracking. Figure 1 presents the geographic distribution of reviewed studies.

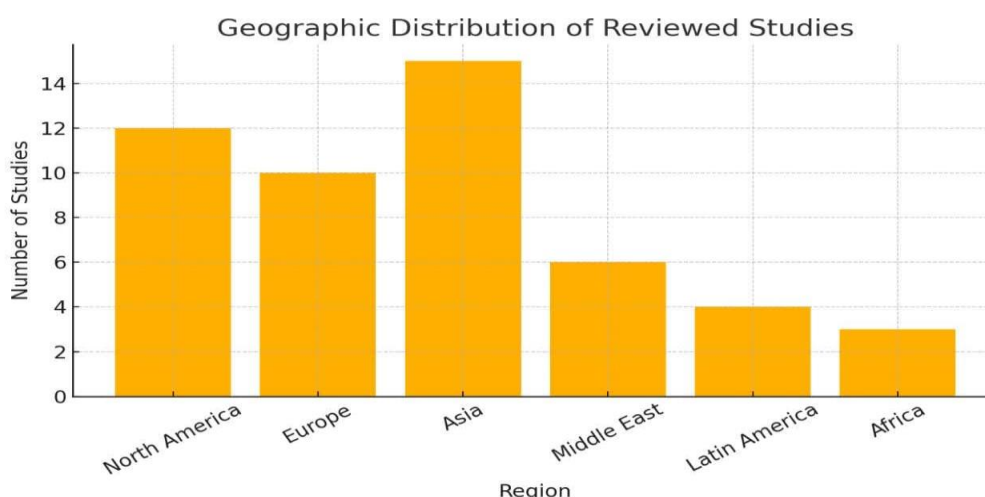


Figure 1. *Geographic Distribution of Reviewed Studies*

Figure 1 illustrates the geographical spread of the 50 reviewed studies, showing that the majority originate from Asian countries—particularly Iran, Indonesia, and Turkey—followed by contributions from North America and Europe. The distribution

highlights regional differences in research activity and adoption of Instagram in ELT.

2. Eligibility criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population/Context: Focused on ELT, ESL, or EFL learners and/or educators.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention/Exposure: Addressed the use of Instagram in teaching, learning, or professional development.
Inclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes: Reported empirical data or substantial theoretical frameworks related to pedagogy, learner engagement, or language outcomes. Publication: Appeared in peer-reviewed journals between 2015 and 2025 and were written in English.
Exclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinion pieces or commentaries without empirical data. Studies focusing solely on other social media platforms unless Instagram-specific findings were clearly disaggregated. Non-English publications

3. Study selection process

The PRISMA process guided the study selection to ensure transparency and replicability. Initial searches yielded 187 records. After removing duplicates, 142 unique records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 92 were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria. Fifty studies were ultimately included in the systematic review. Figure 2 depicts the PRISMA flow diagram, showing the number of records

identified, screened, excluded, and included at each stage.

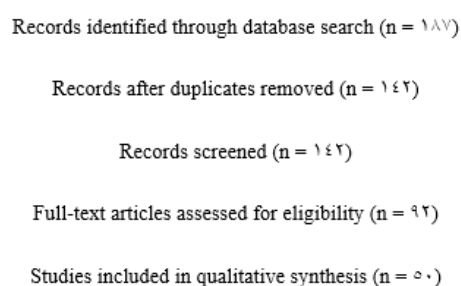


Figure 2. *Study Selection Process (PRISMA Flow Diagram)*

The flow diagram in Figure 2 depicts the PRISMA-based study selection procedure, starting from 187 identified records and culminating in the inclusion of 50 studies. It demonstrates each stage of screening, exclusion, and final eligibility, ensuring transparency of the review process.

4. Data extraction and coding

Each included study was coded using a structured data extraction form developed for this review. Key variables extracted included: Publication year and country, Study design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), Sample size and participant characteristics, Educational level (e.g., K-12, university, adult learners), Instagram usage type (e.g., posts, reels, stories, live sessions, hashtags), Targeted language skills (e.g., vocabulary, writing, pronunciation, reading, grammar), Outcomes (achievement, motivation, engagement, or affective measures), Assessment strategy (e.g., standardized pre-/post-tests, rubrics, platform analytics, self-report surveys) Instructor role (teacher-led, influencer-led, or hybrid).

Two independent coders reviewed all studies. Inter-rater agreement was assessed using Cohen's κ , which reached .80 across key variables, indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. Thematic codes were then assigned to categorize findings under three domains corresponding to the research questions:

1. Pedagogical affordances of Instagram for ELT.
2. Edu-influencer practices and characteristics.
3. Student learning outcomes and engagement metrics.

5. Analytical framework

Data were synthesized using a thematic meta-analytic approach. This involved identifying recurrent patterns across studies, grouping them under emergent themes, and comparing them with existing pedagogical frameworks such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, constructivism, and connectivism. Triangulation was applied by cross-referencing results from studies focusing on platform affordances with those directly measuring student outcomes.

Because of heterogeneity in designs, contexts, and outcome measures, quantitative findings were reported narratively rather than through pooled statistical effect sizes. However, where pre-/post-test data were available, findings were compared descriptively to illustrate the relative strength of evidence. Figure 3 displays the distribution of study methodologies across the 50 reviewed articles.

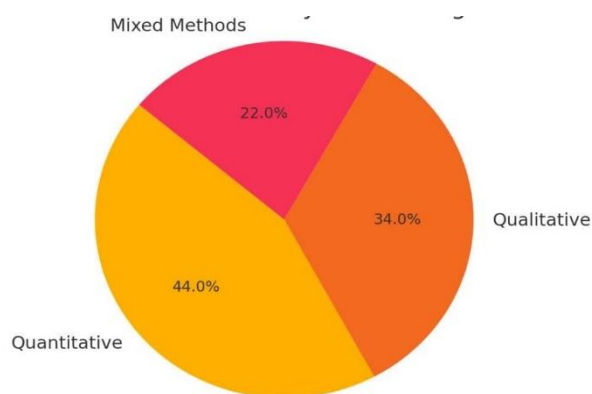


Figure 3. *Distribution of Study Methodologies*

The pie chart in Figure 3 summarizes the methodological approaches used across the 50 studies: quantitative (44%), qualitative (34%), and mixed methods (22%). The figure highlights the diversity of designs while showing the predominance of quantitative approaches.

Results

Findings from the fifty included studies are presented in line with the research questions. The results are organized into three domains: (1) the pedagogical affordances of Instagram for ELT, (2) the practices and characteristics of edu-influencers, and (3) the evidence on student learning outcomes.

1. Pedagogical affordances of instagram for ELT (RQ1)

A cluster of twenty-two studies highlighted Instagram's affordances that align with communicative and task-based language teaching methodologies. Common themes

- Visual reinforcement of lexical items (n = 12)
- Real-time peer and teacher feedback via comments (n = 10)
- Increased exposure to authentic English input (n = 9)
- Motivation enhancement through gamified tasks and likes (n = 11)
- Creative expression via multimodal production (text, image, video) (n = 8)

Together, these features supported active learning, especially when integrated into task-based or reflective pedagogies.

2. Characteristics of Edu-Influencers (RQ2)

Fifteen studies investigated Instagram accounts run by teachers, independent

creators, or institutions that had built large followings. These studies consistently identified strategies that distinguished successful edu-influencers from less visible ones. Table 1 summarizes the most common traits of Successful instagram Edu-influencers.

included learner autonomy, multimodal engagement, and asynchronous participation. Instagram stories and reels were particularly emphasized for their ability to support microlearning.

Several studies found that these tools promoted vocabulary acquisition through contextualized images, aided student expression in multimodal formats, and supported reflection via comment-based peer feedback. Learners engaged more consistently when tasks were visually appealing and socially validated through likes or replies.

The following affordances were most frequently reported across studies:

creators, or institutions that had built large followings. These studies consistently identified strategies that distinguished successful edu-influencers from less visible ones. Table 1 summarizes the most common traits of Successful instagram Edu-influencers.

Table 1

Common Characteristics of Successful Instagram Edu-Influencers

Characteristic	Common Traits	Pedagogical Note
Hashtag strategy	Frequent use of topical and thematic tags	Boosts discoverability but risks superficiality
Content format	Short-form videos, infographics, captioned posts	Enables microlearning but may fragment content
Narrative style	Blend of instruction with personal storytelling	Builds relatability but may dilute rigor
Audience engagement	Responsive to comments/DMs; live Q&A sessions	Strengthens community but feedback quality varies
Collaboration	Co-posts, giveaways, brand partnerships	Expands reach but risks commercial bias

Table 1 presents the main traits of high-visibility edu-influencers, including hashtag

strategies, content formats, narrative styles, audience engagement, and collaborations. It

shows how these practices enhance relatability and visibility but may also pose pedagogical risks.

3. Evidence on student learning outcomes (RQ3)

While most studies praised Instagram’s motivational potential, twenty-one studies provided direct empirical evidence of its effect on learning outcomes. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of targeted skills across these studies.

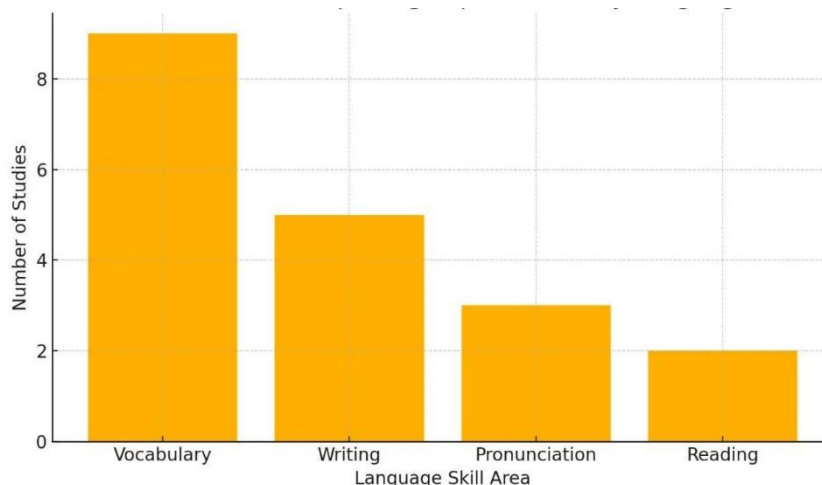


Figure 4. Distribution of Targeted Skills across Reviewed Studies

Figure 4 displays the skills most frequently addressed in the reviewed research, with vocabulary and writing receiving the greatest focus, followed by pronunciation/speaking, while reading and grammar remain underrepresented. Quantitative studies (n = 8)

typically employed pre-/post-tests, while qualitative and mixed-methods studies (n = 5) relied on learner reflections, interviews, or content analysis of Instagram posts and comments. Table 2 also indicates key trends across skills.

Table 2

Summary of Outcome Evidence across Skills

Skill	# Studies	Assessment Methods	Findings
Vocabulary	9	Pre-/post-tests; quizzes	Consistent significant gains
Writing	5	Rubrics; peer feedback; pre-/post	Mixed results; limited paragraph gains
Pronunciation /Speaking	3	Oral ratings; imitation tasks	Moderate improvement in prosody/conf.
Reading	2	Caption analysis; comprehension	Modest, underexplored
Grammar	2	Carousel drills; in-app quizzes	Positive but limited evidence

Table 2 synthesizes the evidence on Instagram's impact on student learning

- Vocabulary (n = 9): Most studies reported significant gains, particularly through short videos, repetition, and hashtag challenges (Enasaroh et al., 2022; Kaviani, 2022; Rosinta et al., 2025).

- Writing (n = 5): Gains were linked to peer feedback (Manullang & Katemba, 2023; Misnawati et al., 2022). But Luaran, Fazal, and Jain (2025) reported lack of sentence structure proficiency and mastery of informal writing conventions.

- Pronunciation/Speaking (n = 3): Learners producing video or voice content (e.g., imitation of reels) showed improvements in prosodic control and speaking confidence (Himmah, 2020; Lukmana & Priyatmojo, 2025)

- Reading (2): Some modest gains were observed in studies analyzing caption reading tasks (Enasaroh et al., 2022; Kaviani, 2022)

- Grammar (2): Carousel posts and quizzes improved syntactic awareness (Duha et al., 2025; Vásconez et al., 2022;).

outcomes, categorized by skill area, assessment methods, and findings. It indicates that vocabulary shows the most consistent gains, while writing, pronunciation, reading, and grammar results remain mixed or limited:

These findings suggest a promising but still fragmented picture of Instagram's effect on student achievement. The lack of standardized measures and longitudinal designs weakens claims of sustained impact. Many studies remained exploratory, focusing more on affective and motivational domains than on measurable proficiency.

4. Engagement patterns and learner behavior (RQ4)

Qualitative data across several studies indicated a shift in learners' attitudes toward English after sustained interaction with Instagram-based content. Students reported reduced anxiety, greater willingness to comment or caption posts, and increased perception of English as relevant to their daily lives.

However, a divide emerged between passive and active engagement. Many learners consumed content passively, while only a minority produced posts, captions, or story replies. This distinction raises important pedagogical questions about scaffolding learners from content consumers to active participants.

Platform analytics further revealed correlations between activity and achievement. For example, learners who regularly engaged with caption-based grammar posts and influencer-led quizzes demonstrated higher post-test scores in targeted areas. Group-based Instagram activities (e.g., collaborative hashtags, peer-review tasks) also improved motivation and task completion, especially when paired with teacher feedback.

Discussion

The findings of this systematic review reveal the multifaceted role Instagram plays in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly through its platform-specific affordances, influencer-driven pedagogy, and emerging evidence of effects on student outcomes. This section interprets the patterns observed across studies, relates them to established theories, and highlights key gaps in the current evidence base.

1. Affordances aligned with modern pedagogies

Instagram's visual, interactive, and mobile-friendly features closely align with sociocultural and constructivist approaches to language learning. Its multimodal content (images, reels, stories, captions) supports Vygotskian principles of mediated learning, where tools and signs shape cognitive development (Azlan & Yunus, 2020; Enasaroh, et al., 2022; Duha et al., 2025; Jiang & Zhao, 2025)

Microlearning tasks, peer feedback, and real-time interaction were repeatedly shown to foster autonomy and collaborative learning.

The platform also supports connectivist perspectives, enabling distributed knowledge across social networks. Azlan and Yunus (2020) demonstrated that polls and interactive stories increased learners' digital confidence and autonomy. Similarly, Alfadda et al. (2022) found that peer instruction activities on Instagram promoted psychological autonomy and a sense of learner agency. However, depth of language processing remains uncertain. While Jiang and Zhao (2025) reported initial grammar gains via carousel posts, the absence of structured follow-up tasks often limited long-term retention. Future research should compare Instagram-enhanced instruction against classroom tasks using equivalent assessment measures to evaluate transfer and durability.

2. Edu-Influencers: Engagement, relatability, and pedagogical concerns

The rise of edu-influencers introduces both opportunities and challenges. Learners often find influencer content more relatable, accessible, and motivating than institutional resources (Casaló et al., 2020; Tambunan et al., 2022). Short reels, storytelling, and

responsive interactions created a sense of authenticity and immediacy that traditional classroom resources sometimes lack.

At the same time, concerns emerged around rigor and credibility. Many edu-influencers lacked formal pedagogical training, and their content blurred the line between teaching and self-promotion (Ranpariya et al., 2020). Baleghizadeh and Saeedi (2025) found that students were sometimes unable to distinguish between posts designed for language learning and those oriented toward lifestyle branding. This dual identity complicates the role of influencers as language educators. Comparable concerns appear in other fields where influencer visibility can overshadow expertise (Pöyry et al., 2021). The pedagogical risks highlight the need for transparent qualifications, alignment with evidence-based practices, and ethical guidelines for digital language teaching.

3. From engagement to measurable achievement

A central tension across the literature is the distinction between high engagement and demonstrable learning gains. Many studies documented strong motivational effects—greater participation, reduced anxiety, and increased willingness to use English (Alfadda, et al., 2022; Enasaroh et al., 2022). Learners reported that Instagram made English more relevant to their daily lives (Taskiran et al., 2018).

Yet, evidence of measurable proficiency gains was mixed. Kaviani (2022) and Luaran et al. (2025) reported moderate improvements in vocabulary retention from hashtag-based repetition tasks. Conversely, Jiang and Zhao (2025) found no significant improvements in writing proficiency, despite learners' frequent use of influencer-led writing prompts.

However, other classroom-based interventions suggest that Instagram essay-writing activities can enhance organization and expression (Erarslan, 2019). These discrepancies underscore the importance of distinguishing behavioral engagement (e.g., likes, comments, time-on-task) from cognitive/linguistic gains.

Overall, Instagram appears most effective when learners move from passive consumption to active production (e.g., caption writing, imitation reels, collaborative hashtags). Outcomes were strongest when tasks included feedback, repetition, or teacher guidance. Without such scaffolding, increased activity did not consistently lead to achievement.

4. Methodological and contextual gaps

The literature remains constrained by methodological limitations. About 56% of the studies employed qualitative or small-scale survey designs, limiting generalizability. Longitudinal and experimental studies were rare, restricting insights into sustained effects. Tayari Ashtiani et al. (2024) noted that reliance on in-app metrics such as likes or comments cannot substitute for standardized assessments of language growth.

Cultural and contextual representation also remains uneven. Most research was clustered in Iran, Indonesia, and Turkey followed by contributions from North America and Europe with minimal studies from under-resourced contexts. Questions of digital equity, access to devices, and institutional policies remain underexplored. Without broader sampling, it is difficult to assess whether Instagram's pedagogical benefits extend across diverse educational and cultural landscapes.

Finally, definitional inconsistencies complicate cross-study comparisons. Engagement was measured variously through self-report, behavioral metrics, or affective reflection, making synthesis difficult. Similarly, skills such as reading and grammar were rarely examined, leaving gaps in our understanding of Instagram's potential across the full spectrum of ELT outcomes.

5. Overall interpretation

Taken together, these findings suggest that Instagram holds promise as an ELT tool, particularly for vocabulary, writing practice, and learner motivation. However, its pedagogical value is highly dependent on intentional integration. Edu-influencer content may provide access and relatability but cannot substitute for structured, curriculum-aligned instruction. Robust learning outcomes are most likely when tasks are scaffolded, outcomes are measured with standardized tools, and learners are guided toward active participation rather than passive viewing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This systematic review has synthesized fifty empirical and theoretical studies published between 2015 and 2025 that address the role of Instagram in English Language Teaching (ELT). The analysis demonstrates that Instagram has become a significant site of informal learning, offering affordances that extend beyond traditional classroom contexts. Its multimodal environment, including posts, reels, stories, and interactive features, aligns with well-established learning theories such as sociocultural, constructivist, and connectivist frameworks. When pedagogically structured, these affordances have the potential to enhance creativity, encourage collaboration, and support learner autonomy.

At the same time, the emergence of edu-influencers represents a notable cultural and pedagogical shift. These figures have created new spaces of instruction that merge education with entertainment and branding. While learners frequently perceive influencer-led content as relatable and accessible, the educational depth and rigor of such material remain uneven. The dual identity of influencers as both instructors and content marketers underscores the importance of transparent practices and pedagogical accountability. Without institutional or professional guidance, the line between instruction and self-promotion risks becoming blurred.

The evidence for Instagram's effect on measurable learning outcomes remains promising but limited. A number of studies reported gains in vocabulary retention, improvements in writing through caption-based peer feedback, and increased confidence in pronunciation when learners engaged in production tasks. However, the majority of the literature emphasized motivational benefits rather than academic achievement, and only a small subset employed standardized assessments or longitudinal designs. These methodological constraints mean that strong claims about Instagram's long-term impact on language proficiency should be made with caution.

Taken together, the review suggests that Instagram should be viewed as a supplementary learning environment that enriches formal instruction rather than replacing it. Its value lies in embedding language practice in learners' everyday lives, sustaining motivation, and fostering informal exposure to authentic English. To realize this potential, future research must prioritize methodological rigor, including standardized

outcome measures, longitudinal designs, and, where possible, effect-size reporting. Pedagogical integration should focus on guiding learners from passive consumption toward active participation and production, supported by teacher feedback and peer interaction. Similarly, edu-influencers should be encouraged to adopt evidence-based strategies and transparent practices that balance engagement with instructional quality.

Finally, institutional and policy support will be essential for the sustainable integration of platforms such as Instagram into ELT. Teachers require digital pedagogy training, time for content development, and ethical guidelines for professional engagement in online spaces. Attention must also be given to digital equity to ensure that learners from diverse contexts have access to the tools and resources needed to participate. With these conditions in place, Instagram can evolve from a trendy supplement into a meaningful, pedagogically sound environment that supports language learning in the digital age.

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