

## Incorporating Instagram Features in EFL Learning Environment

Disa Evawani Lestari<sup>1\*</sup>, Emilius German<sup>2</sup>

President University

Jl. Ki Hajar Dewantara, Cikarang, Jawa Barat 17530,  
Indonesia

disa.silaen@president.ac.id<sup>1</sup>,  
germanexcellent@president.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

\*corresponding author

Received:  
30 July 2021

Revised:  
21 September 2021

Accepted  
30 September 2021

Published:  
27 October 2021

### Abstract

Instagram, famous for its easy picture and video sharing features, also has some other features, such as quiz, question, and poll, which can be used as English learning tools. The incorporation of Instagram becomes a valuable resource as most university students use Instagram. This study aims to explore those features and to investigate students' perceptions of Instagram as learning tools. The research participants are 20 students who speak English as a foreign language (EFL) studying at a university which applies English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The participants follow the researcher's Instagram account and are notified by email for every new post. They, therefore, can view and participate in those posts. The data is gathered from an online questionnaire. The results suggest that quiz is favored for its surprisingly effective function as a correction tool for common errors. In addition, cartoon post is favored as they provide funny and contextual use of the vocabulary which makes the vocabulary memorable. Hence, Instagram becomes an effective English learning environment, which is supplementary to English classes, especially as an error correction and source of vocabulary input reaching a massive number of students with only one post.

**Keywords:** authentic input, error correction, Instagram, EFL

### Introduction

English is spoken and taught as a foreign language in Indonesia but it is no longer that foreign anymore to Indonesian Instagrammers (users of the photo-/video-sharing and social networking service Instagram). It is not surprising to see that English has become the language commonly used by Indonesian Instagrammers in the captions, story, testimony, questionnaire and all other features available on Instagram. Writing an Instagram post in English could be so motivating that the users are often seen willingly allocating some time and putting extra effort to really prepare for a catchy and grammatically-correct post.

Instagram is a photo-video-sharing and social networking application which has at least 1 billion active users around the world (Instagram Press, 2018). Instagram users can create their personal profiles, generate contents for others to view as well as view and respond to contents created by other users. The features



allow users to observe as well as participate in an online social interaction in which English is widely used. This huge community serves as an ideal environment for language learners as language learning occurs both through observation and participation of social interactions (Barton & Potts, 2013).

There is now a growing support among researchers and practitioners for the use of Social Network Sites (henceforth SNS) as an effective way to learn English. SNS is praised for its versatility, adaptability, and the capability to promote learners' independent learning (Benson & Chik, 2010; Rambe & Bere, 2013; Morira, Ferreira, Pereira, & Durão 2016). In addition to that, it also benefits learners with its authenticity which provides them with authentic language exposure from native speakers all over the world through their phone screen, tackling space constraints.

### ***Language Learning Theory and SNSs***

Studies involving Social Network Site (SNS) in language learning greatly emphasizes the importance of social interactions which base the arguments on Vygotsky's (Vygotsky, 1978) sociocultural theory. This theory explains that learners acquire language through social interactions. It means that learners use the language as a meaningful expression to achieve social interaction goals rather than a meaningless and out-of-context drill. In SNS, this interaction happens through features such as posting contents for others to view or viewing and commenting on posts created by other users.

Language learning theory has previously categorized learning as naturalistic (language acquisition through real social interactions) and instructed study (language learning through role-play or abstract thinking) (Ellis, Simpson-Vlach, Maynard, 2008). However, it is quite difficult to identify which one is language learning through SNS (in this study Instagram) as the interaction happens in the cyber world but the interaction itself is real, not pre-designed. Learners are guided (instructed) to create a certain content but the comments coming from other users and how they respond to them are purely their own response (naturalistic).

To achieve maximum result out of the use of SNS in language learning, teachers need to provide learners with effective teacher's guidance and comprehensive student support structure (Conole & Alevizou, 2010). Teacher's role should be as a facilitator where students become the center of every activity.

The following are some principles in the incorporation of SNS into English Pedagogy.

#### **1. Authentic Materials**

Many studies have indicated the effectiveness of using authentic materials in language learning activities. Kirana (2016) describes the role of authentic materials in foreign language teaching. She highlighted that learners need to be exposed to how things are said in the target language, rather than doing a translation from their mother tongue to the target language. It is also argued that learners need to be drilled to be able to use the target language similarly to the way in which the native would.

#### **2. Learners' Motivation**

Users' participation acts as the foundation of language learning in SNS in which they are required to generate content. Therefore, it is important that



the teachers choose a platform which learners find motivating and familiar. In this case, as Instagram has the most users compared to other SNSs, learners will feel more motivated to complete the task. As reported by Blattner & Fiori (2009), learners 'may feel their text has greater authenticity and purpose when done on their social media account in comparison to traditional writing which will only be viewed by their teacher.

### 3. Observation and Participation

These two categories emphasize the equal importance of learners' language competence (reading and listening) with their language performance (writing and speaking). Barton & Potts (2013) elaborate that exposure per se is not adequate for learners to be proficient language user. Language learning is considered as 'language-as-social-practice', meaning that learners need to be exposed to rich and authentic input (vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, pragmatic awareness) before they can confidently participate in social interaction.

### 4. Constructive Feedback

Feedback plays a vital role in integrating Instagram in language learning classrooms. Students are so motivated to create a nice caption or story online but are still bound to make mistakes, be it grammatical or lexical mistakes. Therefore, in order for learning to happen at its maximum rate, teachers need to provide feedback to reinforce learners' sense of accomplishment in every task (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012). In addition to that, learners should also be given the opportunity to receive peer-to-peer feedback through the use of comment section.

### *Studies on other SNSs*

There have been quite a number of studies conducted into analyzing the efficacy of using SNSs in language learning. A study by Prichard (2013) on the use of Facebook in language learning classroom finds out that Facebook can improve learners' proficiency in the four language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as the improvement in grammar, word choice, and socio pragmatic awareness skills. Similarly, Kabilan et al (2010) and Klimanova & Dembovskaya (2010) report that learners' reading skills are improved due to reading native speakers' posts and comments and participating in the comment section.

In addition to that, studies into the use of WhatsApp have been examined to find out the impact of WhatsApp on L2 vocabulary learning (Bensalem, 2018; Dehghan, Rezvani, & Fazeli, 2017; Lawrence, 2014). Those studies found that WhatsApp is an effective tool for providing outside- the-classroom opportunities to practice vocabulary, which if done in the classroom hours, may not be feasible as it takes too much time.

Furthermore, it is also found to effectively develop learners' socio- pragmatic awareness (Blattner & Fiori, 2011) and to expand learners' vocabulary range (Bensalem, 2018). With that research evidence, it is logical to assume that, if



exposure to English through SNS per se (without the integration into English teaching) can enhance Instagram users' English proficiency, integrating Instagram into English pedagogy can cause greater impact.

Previous studies have extensively been focused on researching the impact of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram on learners' language proficiency. However, research into the incorporation of Instagram has not yet been researched thoroughly especially because it consists of different interactional features and uses compared to other SNSs, which might then cause different impacts on learners' language proficiency. Therefore, this study sets out to explore Instagram features for English learning purposes and to investigate learners' perceptions towards Instagram as a pedagogical tool.

### **Method**

This study applies mixed methods in which data on students' perceptions on different Instagram features are collected using likert-scale questions and analyzed quantitatively, while the reason behind students' preferred features were gathered using open-ended questions and researched using thematic analysis. The likert-scale questions gathered data on the students' perceptions on the advantages of the Instagram features to support language learning in an EMI university. The question measures three different areas vital for language learning: interesting, informative, promoting collaboration. In addition to that, the second section of the questionnaire was designed to gather students' own reflection on the Instagram features used in this study by using open-ended questions. There are two main purposes of doing the open-ended questions. First, students

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study are 20 undergraduate students who study at a university which implements English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy. Prior to the study, all participants are informed about the research design and, therefore, were required to follow the researcher's Instagram account and the university's language center account. The participants were recruited through a purposive-sampling method to ensure that the participants came from all the study programs available in that university. The candidates of the participants were emailed with the research design and required to reply to the email to show their consent in participating in the research.

### ***Instruments***

The instruments used in this study are an online questionnaire (consisting of likert-scale and open-ended questions), and Instagram posts created for the Instagram features decided to be the focus of the study (Image posts, Video posts, Quizzes, Polls).



The features analyzed in this study are:

1. Image Posts



Figure 1. Image Post

Figure 1 shows one example of an image post used in this study. This cartoon image is designed by the Language Centre's social media team. As can be observed in Picture 1, some common words in Bahasa Indonesia were translated into English. To make it more interesting, the vocabulary translation is accompanied with funny illustrations which make vocabulary learning memorable to the readers.

2. Video Posts

Figure 2 shows one example of a video post used in this study. This video post is designed by the Language Centre's social media team. As can be observed in Figure 2, a tutor is explaining the pronunciation of a word which is commonly mispronounced. The video post usually covers things which require audio, such as pronunciation, mispronounced words, stress and intonation, accent, etc. The video is made concise, lasting for approximately 30 seconds each and talks about cases which happen a lot in the university.

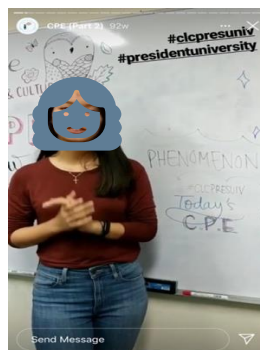


Figure 2. Video Post



### 3. Quizzes

Figure 3 shows one example of quiz used in this study. This quiz is designed by the researchers. Quizzes usually cover all aspects of language, ranging from grammatical structure to idiomatic expression.

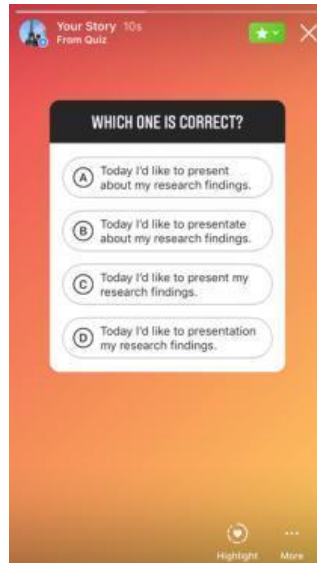


Figure 3. Quizzes

### 4. Polls

Figure 4 shows one example of a poll used in this study. This poll is designed by the researchers. Polls usually cover things related to two confused words, homonym, and homograph. Students are expected to be aware of their mistakes after the result of the poll is released and discussed. Figure 4 is an example of two words which the majority of students have often mistakenly used. That picture also shows the poll result which can also be shared so participants can see the trend. A poll can also be used to map participants' prior knowledge about a topic.



Figure 4. Polls

### Research Procedures

All the research procedures happen within four months. The research procedures are divided into four steps and can be visualized with the following figure.

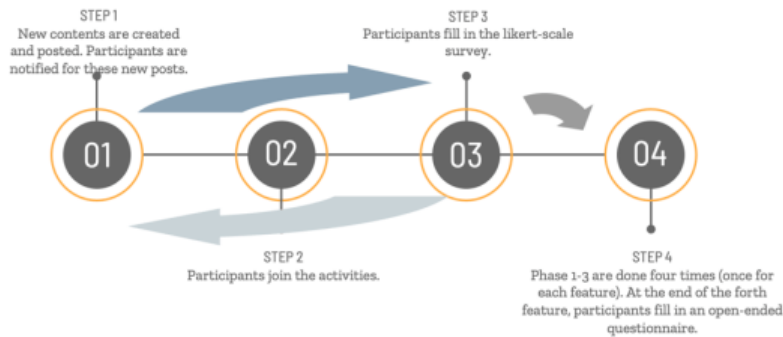


Figure 5. Research Procedures

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered using Google Forms are generated into and represented into bar graphs and pie charts to show the distribution of learners' answers. In addition to that, the qualitative data of learners' reasons towards their preferred features are approached using thematic analysis. As the second section of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, the rich data were analyzed under the two themes which appeared in the responses most frequently. Those themes were authentic input and effective error correction.

### Findings and Discussion

#### Informative, Entertaining, Promoting Collaboration

The results of the likert-scale questions are presented below. Figure 6 summarizes learners' perceptions of the informativeness of each content.

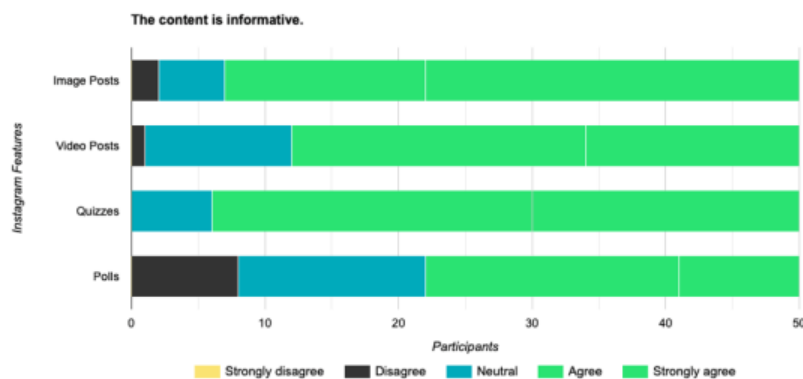


Figure 6. Informative



As can be seen in Figure 6, most participants perceived all features to be informative. The most informative feature is Quiz with 86% of the participants rated Quiz as either informative or very informative. In the open-ended question, it was revealed that the reason Quiz was very informative was because it presented familiar cases in which phrases or sentences had been mistakenly used among students.

The design of the question options which are made based on the mistakes commonly made in the university is a very straightforward way to point common mistakes. Participant 14 suggested the effectiveness of Quiz as a tool for error correction.

Extract 1: The fact that I got the correct answer right after clicking on the options made me directly realize my mistakes and know the correct forms. I am always amazed and shocked at the same time at how many mistakes I have fluently made so far. I heard that so often so I thought it was a correct English. (Participant 14)

These comments seem to provide evidence that the absence of authentic input and the mere reliance on translation in EFL community become a trap for learners' English proficiency. They grow in fluency, but they degrade in accuracy.

Figure 7, on the other hand, provides information about if participants find the content entertaining. This is important because one of the reasons students scroll on their Instagram feed is to get some entertainment, such as funny videos, satirical memes, etc. By getting this data, we can see if the Instagram content can compete with other Instagram contents, or in other words, can catch attention like many contents do. The post that participants found entertaining the most was the Image posts.

Participant 3 explained this:

Students these days really love cartoons. So if you make funny cartoons and combine it with funny examples of the failure of word-to-word translation, vocabulary learning is way more memorable that way.

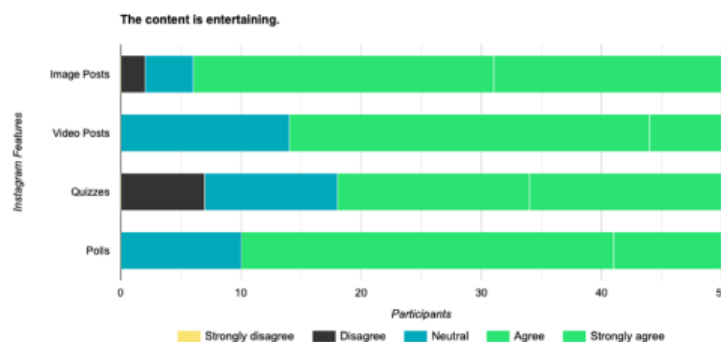


Figure 7. Entertaining





From the last question of the likert-scale, information if Instagram features can promote collaboration was gathered. According to the result, Quiz was considered as the feature which allows collaboration to happen. As language learning happens through an interactional process, it is important to make sure that the feature not only guides (instructs) the learners but also allows them to interact with other learners by creating comments which are purely their own response (naturalistic), not pre-designed. In the quiz section, participants can comment or give reasons for their choices or answer other learners 'confusion about the topic. That interaction in itself is a room for them to use English.

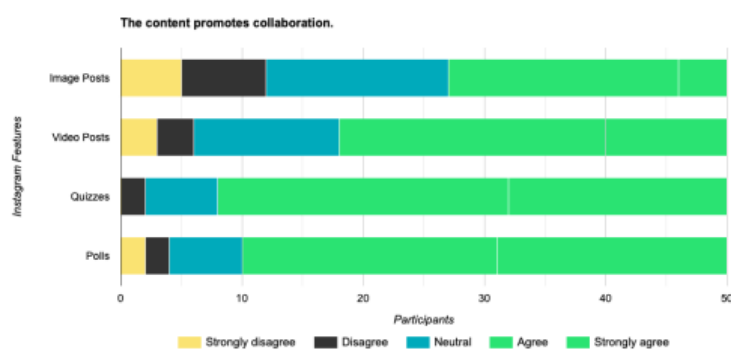


Figure 8. Promoting Collaboration

### ***Authentic Input***

Authentic input provides language learners with many advantages and exposes them to the real English language. The use of authentic materials is not only proven to increase learners' motivation but also is intended to minimize the gap between English in the classroom and English in the real world (Guariento & Morley, 2001). Exposing students to authentic English helps learners acquire an effective receptive competence in the target language. When English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is applied in a country whose people speak English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learners, to a great extent, rely on translation to speak English. The limited input of authentic expressions which shows how the language is used by the native speakers is one of the causes of word-for-word translation strategy. This strategy, although sometimes effective, can make learners lost in translation. Participant 5 recalled such experience and commented:

I once joined an ASEAN student conference and heard one Indonesian participant said *very stupid* several times. I think that is the most hilarious moment during that event because after struggling to understand the context of that speaker, I got to understand that a mistake has happened due to mere reliance on word-for-word translation. The speaker carelessly translates *bodoh amat* into *very stupid*. It's silly but tragic because I may have done similar mistakes with other expressions.

From that comment, it can be seen that the translated words do not convey the message they are supposed to convey, such as *bodoh amat* which is translated into



*very stupid*. We can clearly see that the meaning in the source language and the target language is different. This word-for-word translation does not retain the original meaning of the source language expression, which is *I don't care*.

Therefore, creating an environment on Instagram for providing authentic input of English in use in daily communication can familiarize language learners with expressions to say things in English. With sufficient exposure to authentic input, rather than doing translation, their mind will recall the equivalence of the words or expressions they want to say. Participant 17 discussed that in the following comment:

The picture is nice. It's like I'm reading a webtoon. I don't always understand the vocabulary used, but thanks to the picture, the meaning is predictable.

It is also important to note that language learners cannot recall all the words or expressions they have been exposed to. Therefore, providing catchy image for vocabulary is recommended. Participant 7 mentioned:

Acquiring a new vocabulary while scrolling on Instagram feeds is fun. The catchy illustrations make help the vocabulary more memorable. I remember back then, I used to compile a list of words from the book I read but then felt so difficult to remember the meaning because it has been taken from the book and put in a list.

From the previous comments, it can be seen that memorizing list of vocabulary in isolation to the context is always harder than remembering the meaning of a word used in a certain context. The image does not only function to catch students' attention but also to create context for the vocabulary. This is why vocabulary acquired through a catchy cartoon post lasts longer in memory than those acquired through memorizing a list of vocabulary.

### ***Effective Error Correction***

Most unnatural English expressions made by EFL learners can be easily identified as the result of word-for-word translation from Bahasa Indonesia. Minimum exposure to authentic input leads EFL students to translate from Bahasa Indonesia into English, instead of finding the equivalence or recalling how it is said in English. The following extract from Participant 8 is one example:

I thought *I want to present about* is correct. ... perhaps this sounds correct because I frequently hear it.

In addition to translation problem, mispronunciation happens a lot too, such as the word *delete* which is mispronounced as /delet/ when it is supposed to be /di'li:t/. Because these errors have been made by so many students, it is not effective to correct it in class every time a student makes such a mistake. That will be overwhelming since it happens quite often. Posting it on Instagram as a quiz is an effective way to make learners aware of these mistakes, especially when the options include the incorrect but commonly used words or expressions. This *noticing* is a crucial process in language learning in order that students have a full



grasp of the linguistic features, have them stored in their long-term memory, and can later be recalled naturally.

Error correction often gives teachers a dilemma. It requires teachers' wisdom to use which error correcting strategy to which student at what occasion because error correction, although important, can lead to lower confidence to speak English (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). Too few or too many corrections can result in negative impacts on students' English development as well as their learning motivation. Error correction through Instagram quiz is claimed to be face-saving yet effective. This can be observed in a comment made by Participant 10:

When my teacher corrected my English, I was happy and embarrassed at the same time. I wish my teacher could give me that feedback behind my friends, just like this Instagram quiz.

### Conclusion

As human interaction has, to great extent, is moving to online social media platforms, language learning has to do the same. There are more and more communication happening on social media; one of the most popular platforms now is Instagram. Due to its massive number of users, Instagram can be a good environment for learning English, especially for EFL learners.

The incorporation of Instagram as learning tools provides a good environment for EFL learners and solves some problems faced by EFL learners. First, the minimum exposure to authentic input in an offline EFL environment contributes to the slow development of learners' vocabulary. Instagram posts are expected to provide more authentic input for students in order that students are exposed to English in use. Secondly, strong reliance on translation due to limited exposure to authentic input leads to unnatural English. Finally, a high number of mistakes made by EFL learners due to the previously mentioned causes need an effective error correcting strategy. Instagram quiz has the potential of becoming an effective error correction tool because it provides immediate feedback, can reach a massive number of students just in one post, and most importantly, it is face-saving.

The incorporation of Instagram features to provide a good EFL environment is limited because the number of words possible for a caption is limited and the number of words in the comment section is too. That means the incorporation of Instagram cannot replace the English subject which is taught in class. Instead, it serves as a supplementary tool for the English subject, ideal for correcting frequently made errors and vocabulary acquisition, reaching a lot of students just in one click of a post.

### Acknowledgements

This study is funded by the Ministry of Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.



## References

- Barton, D., & Potts, D. (2013). Language learning online as a social practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(4), 815-820.
- Bensalem, E. (2018). The impact of WhatsApp on EFL students' vocabulary learning. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* Volume, 9.
- Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2010). Chapter four. New literacies and autonomy in foreign language learning. *Digital genres, new literacies and autonomy in language learning*, 63.
- Blattner, G., & Fiori, M. (2009). Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 6(1), 17-28.
- Blattner, G., & Fiori, M. (2011). Virtual social network communities: An investigation of language learners' development of sociopragmatic awareness and multiliteracy skills. *CALICO journal*, 29(1), 24-43.
- Blattner, G., & Lomicka, L. (2012). Facebook-ing and the social generation: A new era of language learning. *Alsic. Apprentissage des Langues et Systèmes d'Information et de Communication*, 15(1).
- Conole, G., & Alevizou, P. (2010). A literature review of the use of Web 2.0 tools in *Higher Education. A report commissioned by the Higher Education Academy*.
- Dehghan, F., Rezvani, R., & Fazeli, S. (2017). Social networks and their effectiveness in learning foreign language vocabulary: A comparative study using WhatsApp. *CALL-EJ*, 18(2), 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.caliej.org/journal/18-2/Dehghan-Rezvani-Fazeli2017.pdf> on 15 July 2020.
- Ellis NC, Simpson-Vlach RI, Maynard C. Formulaic language in native and second language speakers: Psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, and TESOL. *Tesol Quarterly*. 2008 Sep;42(3):375-96.
- Guariento, W., & Morley, J. (2001). Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom. *ELT journal*, 55(4), 347-353.
- Instagram Press. (2018). Retrieved from [www.statistica.com](http://www.statistica.com) on 15 August 2020.
- Kabilan, M. K., Ahmad, N., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education. *The Internet and higher education*, 13(4), 179-187.
- Kirana, D. P. (2016). Authentic Materials in EFL Classrooms. *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 12(2), 353-364.
- Klimanova, L., & Dembovskaya, S. (2010). Facebooking a la russe: Cross-cultural and pedagogical challenges of social networking in the Russian (L2) classroom, France.
- Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (2005). Error correction: Students' versus teachers' perceptions. *Language awareness*, 14(2-3), 112-127.



- Lawrence, D. (2014). Students' Experiences of Using SMS for Vocabulary Development—a Case Study. In Conference proceedings of *ICT for language learning* (p. 310).
- Moreira, F., Ferreira, M. J., Pereira, C. S., & Durão, N. (2016). Collaborative Learning supported by mobile devices: A case study in Portuguese High Education Institutions. In *New Advances in Information Systems and Technologies* (pp. 157-167). Springer, Cham.
- Prichard, C. (2013). Training L2 learners to use SNSs appropriately and effectively. *CALICO Journal*, 30(2), 204-225.
- Rambe, P., & Bere, A. (2013). Using mobile instant messaging to leverage learner participation and transform pedagogy at a South African University of Technology. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(4), 544-561.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Readings on the development of children*, 23(3), 34-41.

