Undergraduate students' perceptions toward writing Instagram captions in English

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, young people significantly are writing online productively. In social media, people offer access to more authentic and engaging writing occasions. One social media platform that provides a writing facility is Instagram. Aside from using Instagram just for entertainment, people have started to use Instagram as a learning medium for many courses, including writing skills. This research aims to describe the students' perceptions of Instagram as a learning medium and writing Instagram captions in English. The methodology of this research was qualitative research. The participants were ten English Education Department students from the 8th semester at a public Islamic university in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The data were collected through interviews and analyzed in three ways, i.e. data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study findings demonstrate that the university students perceived that writing Instagram captions in English could improve their skills in English, make them comfortable, practice their writing skills, and give them chances to reach a wider audience. This study concludes with empirical insights into how EFL educators provide best practices for engaging their students with integrating the advancement of social media platforms in their teaching and learning process.

Introduction

Nowadays, there are so many people using social media. Users use this social media to interact, communicate, share, and construct networking. As one implies, social media can be utilized to share information and for self-expression and personal branding (Maulina et al., 2018). Indonesian students use many social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Zahro, 2022). Many people significantly are writing online productively. Social media offers people access to more authentic and engaging writing occasions (Galvin & Greenhow, 2020). For example, Padgett and Curwood (2016) examined

teen's inventive writing on a platform called Figment and found that the members esteemed the open self-expression and social interaction managed online; the teenager felt that while writing in social media was less limited than it was in a conventional composition classroom. Additionally, Lammers and Marsh (2015) depicted how the young person, in their case, thinks about or prefers fanfiction destinations to discover the space they are required to write openly and freely.

As one of the most productive skills in English, writing is a skill that students should adequately master. Even more so for English Foreign Language students, which will undoubtedly make it easier for their academic writing, such as writing journals, theses, essays, and so on (Toba et al., 2019). It is said that writing is a language skill that, in the idea of building that language, requires knowledge (Suryani & Daulay, 2022). Since writing is a coordinated English skill related to other English skills, students are encouraged to ace writing skills as early as conceivable due to the benefits of writing. Maulida et al. (2022) stated that in studying basic English, between all of the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, writing plays an important role.

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills to master among all the four English skills, and writing takes more time to master than any other skill (Rao, 2019). With writing skills, people can express their thoughts easily; writing skills will expand their skills to think critically, gain self-confidence and develop their creativity (Daulay et al., 2023). Bestari et al. (2020) stated that through writing, students will find it easier to convey their ideas, whether it is writing in simple free writing or even writing something that is more structurally complex, for instance, an essay.

One social media that provides the writing facility in its platform is Instagram. Instagram's name came from the terms "Insta" from "Instant" and "gram", which are derivatives of the word "telegram". Thus, Instagram combines two phrases: Instant and Telegram (Kusumaningtyas & Vanel, 2019). The phrase may be understood from its usage as a contemporary tool for conveying information fast, particularly in the form of images that can be managed, edited, and shared on social media (Ghazali, 2016). A social organizing location for sharing photographs and recordings, Instagram was built in 2010. Instagram could be a moderately unused stage for communication where users can rapidly post overhauls by snapping pictures and applying channels to them since it made a big appearance in October 2010. Both the number of users and entries have experienced colossal improvement. Users can update content using various filters and access the service through an app or a feature-limited inline interface (Carpenter et al., 2020). Instagram is a smartphone software that was first created to allow users to post images and videos (Handayani et al., 2018).

According to Napoleon Cat's data, Indonesia's number of Instagram users reached 97.17 million by December 2022 (Mustajab, 2023). Of the 97.17 million Instagram users in Indonesia, 38% are in the 18-24 age group, and 12.5% are from the 13-17 age group. These percentages show that more than half of Instagram users are students, whether they are high school students or college students. Instagram is a versatile photo-sharing application that permits users to require pictures, apply filters to them, and share them on the platform itself (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

Writing on Instagram can be done by writing a caption on something that the user posts. Another way to write on Instagram is through the delivered message, also known as DM. Writing a caption for a post can be seen by many people. According to Prihatmi et al. (2021), writing a caption for a post means the uploader is adding some information about the post whether it is the explanation of the post or just some quote that they want to share that is related to the post. A caption is contained with some extra information about the post. Not just writing captions also has another side of intention, which is caption is profoundly joined with communicative eagerly of its users undoubtedly or unequivocally, which is generally tended to others (Amirudin & Triyono, 2018).

From the research participants themselves, they already have direct experience in writing on Instagram, whether it is for personal reasons or assignments during college. Even though they all have the same experience writing on Instagram, each participant has a different perception and opinion regarding this matter. Each participant also has a reason for their perception. Based on the cursory observations that the researchers have made on some students who are also the participants in this research, there are still many students who are reluctant to write their Instagram captions in English, much less students who are not English majors. This happens because some feel too embarrassed if they accidentally make a slight mistake while using English for their caption. They feel that their English knowledge needs to be improved so that they can write captions in English. Thus, the primary reason students are reluctant to write their Instagram captions in English is that they think they need to learn more English and have more confidence in writing in English. Besides that, some students think writing Instagram captions in English is useful, and others do not.

Few studies have discussed the same topic as this one. Nabila (2022) conducted a study which aims to explore students' perceptions of English captions on Instagram. This research method is a qualitative description with a case study design. Data collection was conducted using questionnaires and interviews. The participants of this research were 36 students from twelfth graders of social science class in one of public Islamic senior high school in Tangerang, Indonesia. The research shows that students positively perceive writing English text on Instagram. They say Instagram has become one of the best teaching media for exploration and self-study of writing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where they spend much time online

In contrast with the research by Nabila (2022) that took high school students as their participants, this research took 8th-semester students as participants. College students, of course, have better skills and knowledge in writing, which will affect their perceptions and provide different results from the previous research. This research focused on writing because nowadays, many people prefer to express their thoughts in writing, and Instagram is one of many places to write. Students' opinions or perceptions were chosen because the researcher wanted to know how is their opinion about this application; the researcher wanted to know if they found any use for it or if there is any particular reason for them to write on Instagram. Based on the aforementioned elaborations, a closer investigation is needed to explore more about the students' perceptions toward writing Instagram captions, which is writing Instagram captions in English. Therefore, the researchers formulate the research question: What are the university students' perceptions toward writing Instagram captions in English?

Method

According to Sukmadinata (2017), qualitative research is an effort to describe and examine occurrences, events, social interactions, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and ideas of individuals or groups of individuals. In arrange to create the thought of affect skill to issues, clarify the reality related to grounded hypothesis looks, and create an understanding of one or more of the marvels beneath study, qualitative research emphasizes the investigation of thoughts forms deductively and inductively related to the elements of the relationship between the watched marvels and employments logical rational (Hardani et al., 2020).

The data collection method used in this research was semi-structured interview. An interview holds significant value as a means of acquiring essential information through verbal communication between the researcher and the subject. Interviews were frequently employed in survey methodologies and exploratory and descriptive research, and they were a primary data collection tool. The interview is characterized as a purposeful dialogue between an interviewer and interviewee or, alternatively, as a meticulously directed discourse. The interviews in this research were conducted face-to-face between the researcher and the participants. The data obtained from the interview was analyzed using three analysis steps: data reduction, data display, and drawing a conclusion.

This research was conducted at one of public Islamic university in Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia. The researcher recruited ten English Education Department students from 8th semester to participate in this research. These participants were selected based on their experiences writing English captions on Instagram so that they were more concerned about what was being investigated and could respond better than just answering randomly. In this research, the researcher decided to use the qualitative research method as the research design. A sort of social science research known as subjective points to infer meaning from non-numerical information in order to superior social life by centering on particular bunches or areas. To make sense in terms of the meaning individuals assign to these contexts, qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of occurrences in their natural environment. Information from individual encounters, self-reflection, life stories, interviews, perceptions, experiences, and outwardly critical writing are collected utilizing the qualitative method.

Findings and discussion

In this research, fifteen questions were asked of the ten participants. These ten questions were categorized into two categories: the main questions and the supporting questions. The main questions are intended to answer the research question, and the supporting questions are to add information from the research result and for further information about the students' perceptions toward writing Instagram captions in English. There are five findings as follows:

Writing Instagram captions in English could improve English skill

Writing Instagram captions in English is indeed good for our English skill. Looking from many sides, this will show that it is a good thing if we write our Instagram caption in English,

especially if we want to improve our skill in English. This finding is evidenced by the statements from participants as follows:

> I think it could improve someone's skill in English (Semi-structured interview, Student 6, Researcher translation).

Another participant (TR1) explained more:

> Writing captions in English can improve the English language, for when we start writing something, we should select the right and correct English words. The more one writes caption in English, the better the English skill of the person will be (Semi-structured interview, Student 5, Researcher translation).

Participant 1 (MY) also added:

> Because Instagram is a very far-reaching social media platform. The more exposed, used and accustomed to write unconsciously English caption, it will enhance our English skills as well (Semi-structured interview, Student 1, Researcher translation).

These interview data show that beside improving writing skill, through writing Instagram caption in English, it could also improve our English skill itself. Without realizing it, our English skills also improve as we practice our writing skills through Instagram captions.

Writing Instagram captions in English is comfortable

For some people, they rather to express their ideas or thoughts in English. Some people said that they feel cringe when they write something in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Some people said that writing something in English is way cooler that write in *Indonesian language*. Some people said that they feel more comfortable expressing to write something in English. Statements from the participants prove this finding.

Participant 8 (KS) said as follows:

> The thing that interests me in writing English caption is that the first if I write an Indonesian caption, I feel kind of weird or cringe (Semi-structured interview, Student 8, Researcher translation).

Another participant 10 (RY) also said her reason:

> I prefer to write it in English, because if I write it in *Bahasa Indonesia*, I think the caption will lack the feels it should have, and also, I think it would be a bit odd to write it in *Bahasa* (Semi-structured interview, Student 10, Researcher translation).

Another statement came from participant 1 (MY), she said:

> I feel more comfortable expressing things in a foreign language (one of them in English) because sometimes written in *Bahasa Indonesia* is a little cringe (Semi-structured interview, Student 1, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, people mostly prefer and more comfortable to express or to write something in English because they felt weird if they write or express something in Bahasa. By continuously writing in English this benefits the person that their writing skill will be improved.

Writing Instagram captions in English could be used to practice writing skill

To improve writing skills, EFL learners surely need to practice writing. One activity that could use to practice the writing skills through Instagram is by writing Instagram captions in English. This finding can be proved by these statements.

Participant 6 (TR2) said as follows:

Since writing caption is one way to remember what is written in English, remembering some of the vocabulary used may help someone to improve English, especially in writing skill (Semi-structured interview, Student 6, Researcher translation).

Another statement from Participant 9 (SA) that support the statement above:

It can be used as a training tool to improve English writing skill (Semi-structured interview, Student 9, Researcher translation).

Participant 7 (PU) added more to support statements above:

I think English caption in Instagram has benefited everyone, especially if we are developing writing skills. This is because when we write English captions on Instagram, we are able to expand our vocabulary, improve our grammar, and improve our self-expression skills in English (Semi-structured interview, Student 7, Researcher translation).

The interview vignettes portray that writing Instagram captions in English could be used as an activity to practice writing skills. This is because as we write the caption in English, we make sure that what we wrote is correct, whether it is from a structure aspect or grammar. This will also improve our writing skill.

Writing Instagram captions in English gives specific impression

Every person has their own impression of something they do not usually do or is not their habit. Writing something in English for a non-native speaker could give those kinds of feeling or impression. This finding supported by the participants statements.

Participant 2 (SW) and participant 3 (NK) said:

One that prompted me to write English caption because I was quite interested and it looked so cool because it gives more aesthetic impression (Semi-structured interview, Student 2, Researcher translation).

I think it was more aesthetic that the photo post used English caption and that it could be a push to help me write better (Semi-structured interview, Student 3, Researcher translation).

Participant 9 (SA) stated:

I wanted to practice my English by writing, and I felt that my writing was more impressive and effective in English (Semi-structured interview, Student 9, Researcher translation).

This statement is also supported by another statement from participant 8 (KS):

I feel that if I write an English caption, it will leave an impression on me, and I feel cool enough to use English (Semi-structured interview, Student 8, Researcher translation).

The first two statements show that through writing Instagram caption in English, some people thoughts that it gave aesthetic impression. The other two statement showed it could give some certain effect or impression for every person that do it. Participant 9 (SA) said that it has its effect. Meanwhile, Participant 8 (KS) said that it left an impression, and she felt cool doing it, which means it did give some self-satisfaction for some people.

Writing Instagram captions in English gives a chance to reach a wider audience

Instagram can be accessed by many people from all around the world. A user from one country may have mutuals with another country if they do not lock their account. Instagram gave access to view someone's profile or post whether you follow that account or not as long

as they do not lock their account. It allows people to show their photos, videos, or even their writing to the world. Moreover, if the language of the writing is in English, then it will give chance to be noticed by the native speaker since English is international language. This finding can be proved by participants who have been interviewed.

Participant 4 (ST) stated her answer:

Maybe the audience got more, like, overseas people (Semi-structured interview, Student 4, Researcher translation).

Participant 2 (SW) also added:

We can find or reach different audience compared to domestic audience (Semi-structured interview, Student 2, Researcher translation).

This statement is supported by Participant 7 (PU):

Some writing English caption on Instagram benefits are greater audience range, involvement with global communities (Semi-structured interview, Student 7, Researcher translation).

These statements demonstrate that through writing Instagram captions in English, we could reach a wider audience that could view or even examining our writing to be better. English makes interacting with people from other countries easier since it is an international and universal language.

The findings were based on the interview conducted by the researcher with 10 participants. The first finding is that writing Instagram captions in English could improve English skills. The second is that writing Instagram captions in English is comfortable. The third is writing Instagram captions in English, which could be used to practice writing skills. The fourth is writing Instagram caption in English gives certain impression. The fifth is writing Instagram captions in English, which gives a chance to reach a wider audience. Using Instagram captions to practice writing skills could also improve English skills. Writing on Instagram through captions cannot only be used to write something formal, for students can start to write what is in their thoughts, or they can simply write their daily activities. Through this activity, it could also build the students' confidence in their writing. This action of writing caption in English could improve students' vocabulary mastery and their English.

Some students majoring in English Education might be familiar with feeling weird, cringe, or odd when expressing something or writing something not in English. Some think English is more expressive than their native language when writing something. Of course, there are words that are better to use in their native language, but most of them are more suitable, better aimed, and even easier if they are expressed in English. Using Instagram caption as a practice in writing skills is valuable and practical. Students could practice their writing through describing their post in the caption. Since the caption could be seen by many people, students will definitely put more attention to write a better writing that worth seeing by many people. And through this, their writing skill will be improved.

Writing Instagram caption in English could give certain impression for some people. Writing something not in our native language is indeed entirely give some different feeling or we can say it has its own effect. Moreover, if we write in a language, we still learn to understand that language. It could give some people a nervous feeling or the opposite, it could give self-satisfaction. Writing Instagram captions in English allows its users to reach a wider audience. In other words, it could enable users to interact more with people from other

countries. It could give its users chances to interact with English native speaker. Interacting with English native speaker could also improve someone's English. It is also suitable for students to practice their English directly with the native speaker.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, the students' perceptions of writing Instagram captions in English showed that it could improve their skills in English since what they write will be seen by many people, and the urge to do well, to write well and correctly will arise. And so that they can write well and correctly, their English skills must also be good. Writing in English also give more confident for some students. This is because some people find expressing their thoughts in their native language, or in this case, *Bahasa Indonesia*, uncomfortable and a bit strange. It is more accessible for them to write or express what they feel in English. And the last, writing Instagram caption in English gives chances to reach a wider audience. Wider audience means that their post, which are equipped with captions in English, have an opportunity to be seen by more people, not only be seen by people from the same country, which Indonesia, but can also reach and seen by people from various countries all around the world, whether it is an English-speaking country or not. This could happen since English is an international language, so people worldwide will not feel comfortable speaking English. Instagram itself can be used as a medium to improve someone's skills, whether it is reading skill, writing skill, speaking skill, and even listening skill. Apart from that, through Instagram, students can also learn about various fields, not just learning English.

This research is supposed to encourage students to improve their skills, especially writing skills, so they can confidently demonstrate good writing skills. This research also hoped to be used as a reference and give different points of view for upcoming research that might discuss similar topics. This research can also be used as a comparison if further research uses various social media platforms and other levels of participation.

Acknowledgements

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