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# Using Instagram to Maximise Learning

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Instagram is easily one of the most popular apps among teenagers today. As of January 2021, there are approximately 855 million active Instagram users and the projected number of Instagrammers suggests that the app will reach 988 million users in 2023 (Instagram users worldwide 2023, 2021).

In my ongoing series, I have suggested WhatsApp and TikTok as mediums to engage learners and maximise learning scenarios in and out of the classroom. This article will provide some light on how Instagram can be used as an effective tool to improve overall language skills and bring the 4Cs of 21st Century Education to life.



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## Introduction

Using Instagram as a medium for language teaching has numerous advantages and applications. On the one hand, it is relatively intuitive and easy to use for both students and teachers. Most learners are familiar with it (and use it), which prevents having to request students to sign up on a new platform. Teachers who are new to Instagram can easily set up an account and explore a considerable number of resources already tailored for ELT. Ultimately, it also allows teachers and students to connect quickly and collaborate providing learners with a meaningful platform to develop language skills well beyond the physical classroom.

## Instagram and ELT

Instagram, like many other social media platforms, allows students to use a vast number of versatile learning materials free of charge. Instagram in particular provides learners with resources that may be presented through different formats: visual, audiovisual and written posts (Handayani, 2019). So far, there are very few studies on the use of Instagram in the ELT classroom. However, in a study conducted by Wulandari (2019), it was found that using Instagram as a Vlog improved EFL students' spoken abilities. The findings revealed that its usage helped improve confidence, motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency. This is particularly relevant when we consider that language learners sometimes have a limited number of opportunities for extensive language practice, as many are only able to activate productive skills such as speaking and writing during class. Nevertheless, low student motivation in spoken



English activities remains a significant challenge that learners face in language learning, and passiveness in the classroom encourages students to avoid speaking in class. Teachers can help students overcome lack of confidence by equipping them with more skills and Instagram can be utilised to promote and strengthen these skills. Wulandari (2019) argues that using Instagram helped students employ self-reflective learning practices, which is in itself a very important skill. Okada, et al. (2017) argue that students can create, use, and implement better English language strategies by utilising such platforms in the context of ELT promoting risk-taking when using different language skills.

When EFL learners have limited speaking opportunities and require to practise oral skills such as pronunciation, fluency, and other aspects of spoken language, Instagram can bridge this gap effectively. Teachers may post challenges or extra information on a topic; different posts can easily provide additional work or context to further understand a new word, a grammar topic, or the correct pronunciation of a given word. The "comment" feature allows the English language learner to interact in an asynchronous and synchronous environment, which is particularly useful when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also allows students to post responses or complete a required task and allows teachers to provide valuable feedback. A successful publication combined with assertive feedback can improve learning and the student's overall confidence.

Within this context, students can work individually or collaboratively with a partner, a team, or a class on a specific assignment. He or she can post about the group's progress using different means and easily tag learners and the teacher while using different hashtags. Different videos featuring native speakers can be used as an important reference to study conversation, fluency, pronunciation, and other aspects of spoken language. Videos such as songs, conversations, interviews, movie clips, and others can be used for listening activities or prompts for speaking activities or grammar-centred lessons.

## Possible Instagram ideas to augment English lessons

The following suggestions are simply that... suggestions! They work in both asynchronous and synchronous contexts and allow you to adjust learning outcomes depending on the class you are teaching or combine several ideas into a more complex language task or learning sequence.

If you are already an avid Instagrammer, I strongly recommend you create a new profile and keep your personal life separate from your professional role as an educator. I would also recommend creating a unique hashtag for your class.

Among many, many others these are my current **Top 10** suggestions.

1. Ask learners to post a picture about their week/ weekend/holidays. Ask them to talk about it in class for a specific amount of time.
2. Challenge learners to post a picture of how they are feeling and have different students explain what that picture means.
3. Create an ongoing challenge where learners take turns to post the word, song, film, series (...) of the week.
4. Have learners explain a new grammar topic using their examples and words.
5. Post a common mistake your learners make and have students react by identifying the issue and coming up with possible solutions.
6. Challenge learners to post a picture that translates an issue in their community. Work together to come up with a possible solution.
7. Have learners deliver a summative oral presentation (this gives learners the unique chance to see themselves and correct issues such as incorrect body language).
8. Collaboratively post about revision work (assign learners to post on vocabulary, others on grammar, others share

links where they can access further information on a given topic...).

9. Bring the pen friends world to Instagram. Have learners from another school (maybe country) go live with each other and discuss topics that concern both classes (eTwinning may be very useful in finding partners for such a project).
10. Guide learners to take action and campaign for global issues, or those important in their learning context like bullying, healthy eating habits, career prospects, etc.

Some of these ideas have the potential of being transformed into cross-curricular tasks. The sky truly is the limit!

## Instagram profiles worth following:

The following suggestions are dedicated to different language skills and worth following to gather ideas to later suggest to learners. There are many, many others.

### Institutional accounts:

<https://www.instagram.com/bbclearningenglish>

<https://www.instagram.com/cambridgeenglish>

<https://www.instagram.com/ewa.english>

### Private accounts:

[https://www.instagram.com/english\\_grammar\\_vocabulary\\_\\_](https://www.instagram.com/english_grammar_vocabulary__)

<https://www.instagram.com/idiom.land>

<https://www.instagram.com/tofluency>

<https://www.instagram.com/1taskaday>

<https://www.instagram.com/slangcards>





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