

The Correlation Between Exposure to English-Language Content on Instagram and Listening Comprehension among EFL Students at UIN Datokarama Palu

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension is a foundational receptive skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, yet learners often face challenges due to limited access to authentic spoken English. With the widespread use of social media, platforms like Instagram provide abundant daily exposure to authentic audio-visual English content. Although previous studies have explored Instagram in language learning, most have focused on qualitative perceptions or formal classroom-based interventions, leaving the correlation between informal, self-initiated exposure to spoken Instagram content and objective listening comprehension underexplored in higher education contexts. This study examines the correlation between exposure to Instagram English content and listening comprehension among university-level EFL students at UIN Datokarama Palu. Employing a quantitative correlational design, the study involved 38 EFL students selected through total sampling. Data were gathered using a 20-item Instagram English Content Exposure questionnaire and a 10-item listening comprehension test, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment correlation after confirming normality and linearity assumptions. Based on standard categorization, participants demonstrated a high level of exposure to Instagram English content ($M = 79.32$, $SD = 9.927$) and a moderately high level of listening comprehension ($M = 74.21$, $SD = 17.802$). Pearson correlation revealed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.977$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that higher informal exposure to spoken English content on Instagram is strongly associated with better listening comprehension performance. While the study does not establish causality or test a pedagogical intervention, it offers practical and empirical contributions by highlighting Instagram's potential as an effective supplementary resource for expanding authentic input and supporting autonomous listening practice in EFL higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as a global lingua franca, playing a pivotal role in international communication, education, technology, and cross-cultural exchanges [1]. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, developing listening comprehension is paramount because listening serves as the primary channel for language acquisition, providing the essential input required for language production [2], [3]. Language acquisition occurs optimally when learners are consistently exposed to meaningful, authentic, and comprehensible input [4]. However, in traditional EFL environments like Indonesia, students often lack natural exposure to authentic spoken English outside the classroom, making digital technology and social media indispensable supplementary tools for bridging this exposure gap [5], [6].

Despite its importance, listening comprehension remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL university students. Listening is a complex cognitive process requiring learners to process acoustic signals simultaneously, decode phonological units, and construct contextual meaning in real time [3]. In daily academic settings, learners frequently struggle with fast speech rates, unfamiliar accents, reduced forms, and limited vocabulary knowledge. While social media platforms offer continuous access to spoken English, there is a need to understand how non-classroom audio-visual exposure relates to learners' cognitive listening processing. The relationship can be explained by the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and the Dual-Coding Theory [7]. Social media platforms—specifically Instagram—provide rich multimodal input where spoken language is synchronized with visual cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, text captions, and situational context). This dual-coding mechanism reduces cognitive load, scaffolds auditory message decoding, and aids spoken-word recognition [8], [9]. Furthermore, frequent and repeated exposure through autonomous viewing fosters incidental vocabulary learning and familiarizes learners with natural speech cadence [4], [5].

To avoid ambiguity, this study defines “Instagram English content exposure” as the frequency, duration, and degree of student engagement with short-form audio-visual content (such as Reels, Stories, and short videos) that features active spoken English input [1]. It is crucial to distinguish general Instagram usage (e.g., viewing static photo posts, reading text-only captions, or browsing silent graphics) from spoken audio exposure, as listening development relies fundamentally on processing auditory language input. Therefore, this study isolates content involving spoken English—encompassing both educational tutorials and authentic everyday entertainment—to capture how attentive listening exposure on social media correlates with comprehension performance [1].

Previous research has increasingly recognized Instagram's pedagogical value in language learning [6], [10], [11]. A body of literature demonstrates that social media features boost learner motivation, foster positive attitudes, and facilitate autonomous learning outside formal classrooms [12], [13]. Specifically regarding listening skills, continuous engagement with Instagram language-learning pages enhanced Iranian EFL learners' listening performance over a six-month period [14]. Similarly, features such as Reels, Stories, and Live sessions have been found to support listening comprehension and student engagement

positively [15]. Additionally, studies exploring short-form video platforms and authentic digital content have reported positive associations with EFL listening development [9], [16], [17]. Taken together, these studies suggest a growing pattern: interactive, short-form multimedia platforms possess strong potential to supply authentic language input that supports foreign language listening growth [6], [16], [18].

However, a critical synthesis of the existing literature reveals notable theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps [1]. Methodologically, prior studies have predominantly relied on short-term experimental interventions, qualitative perception surveys, or focused primarily on secondary school students [14], [15]. Theoretically, empirical research that directly quantifies non-interventional, routine daily exposure to short-form spoken content (Reels/Stories) and tests its statistical correlation with standardized academic listening tests among university EFL learners remains scarce. Moreover, many past studies aggregated multiple platforms together (e.g., combining YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram), failing to isolate the specific relationship between daily informal Instagram audio exposure and formal listening comprehension skills [17]. This study's novelty lies in measuring informal, self-directed Instagram audio-content exposure as an independent variable without instructional manipulation and evaluating its direct linear relationship with academic listening test performance in an Indonesian higher education context [1].

To address these gaps and contextual realities, this study examines the correlation between Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension among EFL students at UIN Datokarama Palu. Specifically, this study addresses the following research question: Is there a statistically significant correlation between informal exposure to English audio content on Instagram and the objective listening comprehension scores of EFL students at UIN Datokarama Palu?

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to EFL pedagogy [1]. Theoretically, it extends the applicability of Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory to informal, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) environments [4], [7], [8]. It provides empirical clarity on how informal, multimodal social media consumption correlates with receptive language processing. Practically, the findings offer insights for EFL educators and curriculum designers to strategically integrate short-form social media content as supplementary authentic materials, encouraging autonomous, technology-enhanced listening practice beyond the traditional classroom setting [1], [6], [18].

2. METHOD

This study used a quantitative, correlational design to examine the relationship between exposure to Instagram English content (predictor variable) and listening comprehension (criterion variable) among EFL students. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without manipulating or administering any treatment to the participants. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 15.0,

and Pearson Product-Moment correlation was employed because both variables were measured on interval scales and the assumptions for parametric analysis were satisfied.

The study was conducted at the English Education Study Program of UIN Datokarama Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Data collection took place on 15 July 2026 during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants consisted of 38 fourth-semester students from the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program. Among the participants, 9 were male and 29 were female, and all had active Instagram accounts. Because the population consisted of only 38 students, the researchers used a total sampling technique, allowing every member of the population to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active fourth-semester students from the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program, possess an active Instagram account, voluntarily agree to participate in the study, and complete both research instruments. Students who did not meet these criteria or failed to complete either instrument would have been excluded from the study. However, all 38 participants successfully completed both the questionnaire and the listening comprehension test; therefore, no participant was excluded from the final analysis. Because the participants represented only the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program at UIN Datokarama Palu, the findings primarily represent this cohort and should be generalized to broader EFL student populations with appropriate caution.

The study utilized primary data collected directly from the participants through two research instruments: an Instagram English Content Exposure questionnaire and a listening comprehension test. Data collection began after participants were informed about the study's purpose and agreed to participate voluntarily. Participants first completed the Instagram English Content Exposure questionnaire and then took the listening comprehension test. Both instruments were administered under the same procedures, and all completed responses were collected for statistical analysis.

The Instagram English Content Exposure questionnaire was designed to measure students' exposure to English-language content on Instagram, including Reels, Stories, videos, and other audio-visual materials. The questionnaire consisted of statements measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The listening comprehension test consisted of ten multiple-choice questions designed to assess students' ability to understand spoken English. The test measured several aspects of listening comprehension, including identifying the main idea, recognizing specific information, interpreting implied meaning, understanding vocabulary in context, and identifying the speaker's attitude. Accordingly, the predictor variable, Instagram English content exposure, was measured using participants' questionnaire scores, whereas the criterion variable, listening comprehension, was measured using participants' scores on the listening comprehension test.

Before data collection, two lecturers from the English Education Study Program established the content validity of both instruments through expert judgment. A pilot study then examined the instruments' validity and reliability. Item validity was analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, while internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics version 15.0.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics summarized participants' questionnaire and listening comprehension scores. Before hypothesis testing, the assumptions for parametric analysis were examined through the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, and the linearity test. After the assumptions were met, Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05. The null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted when the obtained p-value was less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the predictor and criterion variables.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Before completing the research instruments, participants were informed of the study's purpose. To protect participants' privacy, all responses were treated confidentially, participants' identities were anonymized throughout the research process, and the collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, including participant characteristics, descriptive statistics on Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension, the results of the assumption tests, and the Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis used to examine the relationship between the two variables.

3.1. Participant Characteristics

The participants consisted of 38 fourth-semester students from the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program at UIN Datokarama Palu. Of the total participants, 9 (23.7%) were male, and 29 (76.3%) were female. All participants were fourth-semester students and had active Instagram accounts. All 38 participants completed both the Instagram English Content Exposure questionnaire and the listening comprehension test. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants by gender.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Charactetistic	Frequency	Percentage
Male	9	23,7%
Famela	29	76,3%
Total	38	100%

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the two variables. The Instagram English Content Exposure scores ranged from 56 to 95, with a mean score of 79.32 and a standard deviation of 9.927. Meanwhile, the listening comprehension scores ranged from 30 to 100, with a mean score of 74.21 and a standard deviation of 17.802.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instagram English Content Exposure	38	56	95	79.32	9.927
Listening Comprehension	38	30	100	74.21	17.802

3.3. Normality Test

Before conducting the correlation analysis, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to examine the normality of the two variables. As shown in Table 3, the significance value for Instagram English Content Exposure was .122, while the significance value for Listening Comprehension was .074. Both values were greater than .05, indicating that the data for both variables were normally distributed.

Table 3. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

Variable			Sig.	Interpretation
Instagram	English	Content Exposure	.122	Normal
Listening Comprehension			.074	Normal

3.4. Linearity Test

The linearity assumption was examined using an analysis of variance test for linearity. The results showed a significance value of .000 for the linearity component and .564 for the deviation from linearity. Because the significance value for deviation from linearity was greater than .05, there was no significant deviation from linearity. Therefore, the relationship between Instagram English Content Exposure and Listening Comprehension was considered linear.

Table 4. Test of Linearity

Linearity Component	F	Sig
Linearity	732.872	.000
Deviation from Linearity	.926	.564

3.5. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

After the assumptions of normality and linearity were satisfied, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Instagram English Content Exposure and Listening Comprehension. The results showed a Pearson correlation coefficient of .977 with a significance value of $p < .001$ and $N = 38$. This indicates a very strong positive correlation between Instagram English Content Exposure and Listening Comprehension. Thus, higher levels of Instagram English content exposure were associated with higher listening comprehension scores among the participants.

Table 5. Person Product-Moment Correlation

Variable	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Instagram English Content Exposure – Listening Comprehension	.977	.001	38

3.6. Hypothesis Testing

The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that no significant correlation existed between Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that a significant correlation existed between the two variables. The correlation analysis produced a significance value of $p < .001$, which was lower than the predetermined significance level of .05. Therefore, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was supported. The findings indicate that exposure to Instagram English content was significantly and positively correlated with listening comprehension among the participating students.

Overall, the findings demonstrated a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension ($r = .977, p < .001, N = 38$). These findings primarily describe the relationship observed among the 38 students in the 2024 cohort examined in this study.

The present study found a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between Instagram English Content Exposure and Listening Comprehension among the 38 fourth-semester students in the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program at UIN Datokarama Palu ($r = .977, p < .001$). This finding indicates that students who reported higher levels of exposure to English-language content on Instagram also tended to obtain higher listening comprehension scores. However, because the study used a correlational design and did not manipulate Instagram exposure, interpret the result as an association rather than evidence that Instagram exposure caused higher listening comprehension.

The magnitude of the coefficient requires particular caution. A correlation of .977 is unusually high and is close to a perfect positive relationship. Therefore, the coefficient should not be treated automatically as evidence that the relationship is entirely attributable to Instagram English content exposure. One possible methodological explanation is overlap between the constructs measured by the two instruments. If an exposure questionnaire contains items such as whether students can understand or follow English videos on Instagram, the responses may reflect English proficiency or listening ability in addition to exposure. This overlap can make a predictor measure conceptually similar to the criterion measure and may inflate the association. More generally, common method and measurement-related biases may systematically influence observed relationships when constructs are measured in closely related ways [19].

The coefficient is also considerably stronger than correlations reported in some related studies. For example, a positive correlation of $r = .582$ was reported between social-media use as an informal English-learning source and digital Business English communication competence [20]. Likewise, a significant correlation was found between social-media engagement and reading comprehension, with Instagram showing a correlation of $r = .395$ [21]. Although these studies examined different outcomes, populations, and

instruments, their coefficients provide useful contextual comparisons: the $r = .977$ found in the present study is substantially larger. This difference suggests that the unusually strong relationship may reflect characteristics of the present sample or measurement procedures in addition to a substantive relationship between Instagram exposure and listening comprehension.

The positive association is nevertheless theoretically plausible. The findings are consistent with the view that language development is supported by meaningful and comprehensible input [4]. Instagram can expose learners to spoken English through Reels, Stories, videos, and other audio-visual materials, giving them opportunities to encounter pronunciation, vocabulary, intonation, and everyday expressions. This result also aligns with [3]'s view of listening as an active process in which learners interpret spoken language by integrating linguistic and contextual information. In addition, technology can expand learners' access to authentic language input beyond the classroom [5]. These perspectives provide a theoretical explanation for why greater exposure may be associated with better listening performance, but they do not establish a causal direction in the present study.

The audio-visual nature of Instagram may also help explain the observed association. Evidence shows that audio-visual input is multimodal and can provide learners with visual information and on-screen text alongside spoken language [22]. Such cues may help learners infer meaning when parts of the spoken message are difficult to understand. This interpretation is also supported by findings showing that Instagram features such as Reels, Stories, Posts, and Live can support students' engagement with English listening materials [15]. However, audio-visual support also creates an important distinction: understanding a short Instagram clip with facial expressions, images, gestures, contextual scenes, or captions is not necessarily equivalent to understanding decontextualized academic listening without visual support. Thus, success with Instagram content should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of equivalent performance in formal listening contexts.

The distinction between informal exposure and structured listening practice is therefore important. Instagram may provide authentic, incidental contact with English outside the classroom, whereas structured listening practice typically includes clearly defined learning objectives, selected materials, repeated listening, comprehension questions, and teacher-guided strategies. Similarly, research on incidental English learning through social media using self-reported exposure and a separate English-ability test highlighted that the relationship between incidental exposure and language ability should be considered in relation to the quality and depth of the input rather than exposure frequency alone [23]. This supports a cautious interpretation of the present finding: Instagram exposure may form part of learners' broader English-learning environment, but it should not be equated with systematic listening instruction.

Another possible explanation is reverse directionality. Students with stronger listening comprehension may be more willing to seek out, understand, and continue watching English-language content on Instagram. Similarly, students who already enjoy English may intentionally follow English-speaking creators and consume more English-language media. Therefore, the direction may partly run from listening ability or English interest to greater exposure, rather than exclusively from exposure to listening development.

Because exposure and listening performance were measured within the same study period, the present design cannot establish temporal order. Cross-sectional designs require careful consideration of reverse causality and other alternative explanations when assessing causal relationships[24].

Third variables may also contribute to the strong relationship. Vocabulary size and general English proficiency may influence both students' ability to understand Instagram content and their performance on the listening test. Other possible factors include academic achievement, motivation, socioeconomic access to smartphones and stable internet, time spent studying English, participation in private English courses, and previous exposure to English-language films, YouTube videos, podcasts, music, or other digital media. These factors were not controlled for in the present study. Consequently, the correlation of .977 should not be interpreted as showing that Instagram exposure alone accounts for students' listening comprehension.

The existing literature provides additional context for interpreting Instagram as a language-learning environment. A systematic review and meta-analysis of empirical studies on Instagram as a mobile-assisted language-learning tool found significant positive effects across the included experimental literature [25]. However, their review also showed that much of the research focused on areas such as writing and vocabulary, while listening was represented by relatively few studies. This difference is important because the present study specifically examined listening comprehension and used a correlational rather than an experimental design. Therefore, the present finding adds evidence of an association but should not be interpreted as an intervention effect.

The results are also broadly consistent with previous studies already discussed in this study. Debeş reported positive outcomes associated with sustained engagement with English-learning content on Instagram, Instagram features could support listening comprehension and learner engagement [15]. Previous research also supports the broader role of digital and mobile environments in creating opportunities for English exposure[26]. Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted alongside the methodological differences among studies rather than treated as direct evidence that Instagram exposure causes listening development.

For this reason, the present study should avoid describing Instagram as an 'effective' resource for improving listening comprehension. Effectiveness is better evaluated through intervention, experimental, or comparative designs in which exposure is deliberately manipulated, and outcomes are compared across conditions. The present study did not provide an Instagram-based treatment or experimentally control students' exposure. Its contribution is therefore better stated as evidence of a strong association between exposure to Instagram English content and listening comprehension within the studied cohort.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of only 38 students from one 2024 cohort at one university, so the findings should primarily be generalized to the participating cohort rather than to the wider EFL student population. Second, exposure was measured with a self-report questionnaire, which may not fully reflect actual viewing behavior. Third, the correlational design does not establish causality or temporal order. Fourth, the authors did not include potentially important variables such as

vocabulary size, general English proficiency, motivation, academic achievement, previous English-learning experience, private English courses, and exposure to other English-language media as control variables. Finally, if any questionnaire item measured students' ability to understand English content rather than exposure itself, construct overlap may have contributed to the unusually high coefficient. Consider this possibility when interpreting $r = .977$.

The findings nevertheless have cautious practical implications. Students may use Instagram as one additional source of informal exposure to spoken English, while teachers may encourage learners to engage critically with English-language audio-visual content outside the classroom. However, Instagram exposure should complement, not replace, structured listening practice, particularly when the learning goal involves academic listening without visual support. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, examine students across several institutions, and employ longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify temporal and causal relationships. Researchers should also separate exposure indicators from comprehension indicators in questionnaires, measure general English proficiency and vocabulary as potential confounding variables, and, where ethically and practically possible, combine self-report data with more objective indicators of social-media use.

Overall, the present study demonstrates a very strong positive association between Instagram English content exposure and listening comprehension ($r = .977, p < .001$). This relationship is strong but should be interpreted cautiously. The result may reflect genuine differences in English exposure, but it may also be influenced by measurement overlap, reverse directionality, and unmeasured third variables. A cautious interpretation therefore provides a more defensible account of what the present correlational evidence can and cannot demonstrate.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the association between exposure to Instagram English content and listening comprehension among EFL students at UIN Datokarama Palu. The findings showed a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .977, p < .001$), indicating that students with higher levels of exposure to English-language content on Instagram tended to have higher listening comprehension scores. However, this finding should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence that Instagram exposure causes improvements in listening comprehension.

The findings suggest that Instagram may serve as a supplementary source of informal English exposure, particularly through audio-visual content that provides learners with opportunities to encounter spoken English beyond the classroom. Nevertheless, Instagram should not be regarded as a replacement for structured listening instruction. The educational implication of the finding should therefore be considered cautiously, especially given the unusually high correlation observed in this study.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a small sample of 38 students from a single institution and one cohort, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the results cannot be broadly generalized to all Indonesian EFL learners.

In addition, the study measured English content exposure through self-reported responses, while assessing listening comprehension with a ten-item test. Potential measurement overlap between the exposure questionnaire and listening ability may also have contributed to the very high correlation. Furthermore, the study did not examine relevant control variables, including baseline English proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, and learning motivation. Finally, the cross-sectional correlational design does not allow researchers to establish causal relationships or the direction of the relationship.

Future research should use larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal or experimental designs to examine whether English content exposure through Instagram contributes to changes in listening comprehension over time. Future studies should also use more objective measures of exposure, such as digital-usage logs or structured Instagram-based learning activities, and control for baseline English proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, and learning motivation. These approaches may provide stronger evidence regarding the relationship between social-media exposure and English listening development.

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