

EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF READING INSTAGRAM CAPTION IN EXTENSIVE READING

Tisa Azizah

Department of English Education, University of Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia
tisaazizah150@gmail.com

Dini Utami Mulyaningsih

Department of English Education, University of Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia
diniutami@uinsgd.ac.id

Hapid Ali

Department of English Education, University of Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia
hapidali@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates EFL Students' perceptions of using Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading activities. Motivated by students' low interest and motivation in reading English texts, often seen as difficult and unengaging, the study explores Instagram as a more accessible and relatable medium. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from eight fourth-semester students in an English Language Education program through questionnaires, interviews, and supporting documentation. The findings reveal generally positive perceptions, influenced by internal factors such as motivation, emotional responses, and personal experience, as well as external factors like caption clarity and the digital environment. Instagram captions are perceived as interesting, relevant, and easy to access, suggesting their potential to enhance student engagement in Extensive Reading contexts.

Keywords: Students' Perceptions, Instagram Captions, Extensive Reading, Digital Reading Materials, English Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Extensive Reading is a practical language learning approach used through students' exposure to many readings, focusing on understanding the entire text. Day & Bamford (1998) define Extensive Reading as an approach used in language learning where students are asked to read many relatively easy and enjoyable texts to develop reading skills. Extensive Reading has long played a role as a strategy that can be used in learning to develop language skills through repeated exposure to language structures in meaningful context. Nation & Macalister (2020) emphasize that Extensive Reading provides comprehensive exposure to language through natural use, allowing learners to develop an implicit understanding of language in various contexts.

Although the benefits of Extensive Reading have been widely recognized, its implementation in Indonesia faces significant challenges. Based on data, in Indonesia, students' interest in reading English is still relatively low, and students' motivation is poor because students still think that reading English is tedious and difficult to understand. Israel (2017) said that the reason why students' reading interest is relatively low is that students consider reading to be a tedious activity; most students only read for academic purposes (extrinsic motivation), not as a fun activity (intrinsic motivation). This is in line with the explanation from Mega (2018) that many students have difficulty finding reading materials that suit students' interests. Therefore, the availability of interesting reading material for students is an important factor in student involvement in reading. In this case, digital technology has made it easier for students to find interesting reading materials.

The use of digital technology has significantly transformed English learning practices, especially in overcoming challenges in Reading. Stockwell (2016) argues that a modern digital-based learning environment increases access to authentic English Materials and expands opportunities for acquiring a second language. Digital technology, especially social media, offers various types of English content in authentic contexts and is relevant to students' daily lives. Therefore, this significantly raises the potential to encourage Extensive Reading involvement.

Instagram, as a popular social media platform, offers potential that can be used as a source of reading material in Extensive Reading. Sitorus & Azir (2021) explain that Instagram provides authentic and reliable content through verified accounts that can support language learning, especially in reading. Instagram captions have characteristics that are in line with the principles of Extensive Reading, even though the text format is relatively short. The main principle of Extensive Reading is that students must easily understand reading materials (Day & Bamford, 2002). This is so that students can read fluently without obstacles to understanding the language in the text, and it can be used as accessible reading material.

The principle of Extensive Reading, according to Richard & Renandya (2002), is reinforced by emphasizing that students can read large amounts, freely choose reading materials, access diverse reading materials based on topics and genres of interest, and use appropriate reading materials based on comprehension levels. Instagram captions support this principle because students can read short texts in a short time, which makes reading activities light. In addition, diverse topics such as lifestyle, travel, politics, business, and health from various genres provide opportunities to choose reading materials based on student interest. Therefore, the ease and readability of Instagram captions play an important role in shaping students' perceptions, which play a crucial role, especially in the success of Extensive Reading.

Students' perceptions of reading materials in learning are crucial in influencing the success of implementing Extensive Reading by using Instagram captions as reading materials. According to Grabe & Stoller (2020), students' perceptions can significantly influence students' involvement and motivation in language learning. In line with this view, Aloraini & Cardoso (2020) explain that students' perceptions of media use for language learning can vary depending on the students' proficiency level. Thus, understanding students' perceptions is the primary key to determining the effectiveness of using Instagram captions as reading materials in Extensive Reading.

Several studies on Extensive Reading have been conducted. First, a study conducted by Agustina, Susilo, & Surya (2022) examined how using short stories in Extensive Reading can improve the reading attitudes of EFL students. The results of this study indicate that the use of short stories in Extensive Reading has a positive effect on the reading attitudes of EFL students in secondary school, especially in terms of comfort and anxiety. In addition, Ateek (2021) examined the impact of Extensive Reading in EFL classes using books in the library. The results of this study indicate that Extensive Reading helps improve EFL students' reading fluency and vocabulary, which is supported by students' positive experiences with interesting and easy reading materials. The results of this study indicate that Extensive Reading during online learning provides benefits in improving students' vocabulary, habits, and reading speed.

This contrasts with previous studies that examined reading activities using short stories, printed books, and formal e-learning as reading materials. No research specifically examines Instagram captions as reading materials in Extensive Reading activities. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring EFL students' perceptions of using Instagram captions as

reading materials in Extensive Reading activities using qualitative methods, especially in the context of learning at the university level.

Based on the research gap outlined above, this study is crucial to uncover the potential of Instagram captions as reading material for Extensive Reading activities. Instagram can be used not only for entertainment or healing but also as a language learning tool. The Instagram caption features, which present concise, authentic text relevant to students' lives, have the potential to be engaging reading material while simultaneously increasing their motivation and interest in reading.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate EFL students' perceptions of reading Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading activities. This approach was deemed appropriate because it requires an understanding of the meaning of experiences, in accordance with Creswell (2012), and an explanation of understanding social phenomena through the perspectives of participants. This study employed a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly across the boundaries of phenomena and context that do not align with stated statements (Yin, 2014).

The participants were fourth-semester EFL students from the English Education Study Program, class of 2023, at an Islamic university in West Java, Indonesia. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used to select students who had experience using Instagram captions in Extensive Reading activities. Eight students were selected to complete a questionnaire, and from these, three participants representing varying levels of perception (highly positive, moderately positive, and neutral) were chosen for in-depth interviews based on availability and relevance to the research focus.

Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The questionnaire consisted of 18 closed-ended items in English, distributed via Google Form to eight EFL students who had used Instagram captions in Extensive Reading activities. It aimed to explore their perceptions and identify participants with relevant experience. The items were developed based on Walgito (2004), perception theory, covering cognitive, affective, and conative aspects, and used a four-point Likert scale. To answer the second research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three selected students representing varying perception levels. The interviews, conducted online via Google Meet, were guided by Walgito's (2010) framework on internal and external factors influencing perception. Additionally, documentation in the form of screenshots of Instagram captions was used as supporting data to reinforce the interview findings, in line with Creswell & Poth's (2018) view on the role of visual materials in qualitative research.

The data were analyzed using Creswell's (2012) six-step data analysis framework. First, the researcher organized and prepared data from questionnaires, interviews, and documentation, including transcription and categorization. Second, the data were read thoroughly to gain an overall understanding and initial impressions. Third, coding was applied based on the research questions to identify key patterns. Fourth, the findings were presented thematically, linking questionnaire results to students' general perceptions and interview data to the influencing factors. Fifth, the findings were interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions regarding students' perceptions and influencing factors. Last, validation was conducted through data triangulation by comparing results from questionnaires, interviews, and documentation to ensure accuracy and credibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are reported in two main parts: the results of the questionnaire, which pertain to EFL students' perceptions of using Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading activities, and the results of the interviews, which

reveal the factors that influence EFL students' perceptions of reading Instagram captions as part of Extensive Reading activities.

1. EFL Students' Perceptions of Using Instagram Captions as Reading Material in Extensive Reading Activities

Table 1: The results of the questionnaire

No	Statement	Main Findings
Cognitive		
1	Instagram captions provide clear explanations that help me understand the content.	1 Student (12,5%) strongly agree, 4 Students (50%) agree, and 3 Students (37,5%) disagree.
2	The Instagram captions that come with the images/video provide a clear context for me to understand the reading very easily.	5 Students (62,5%) strongly agree, 1 Student (12,5%) agrees, and 2 Students (25%) disagree.
3	Reading Instagram captions helps me understand text better.	2 Students (25%) strongly agree, and 6 Students (75%) agree.
4	Reading Instagram captions helps me understand new vocabulary in English.	2 Students (25) strongly agree, and 6 Students (75%) agree.
5	Instagram captions present a wide variety of language styles, vocabulary, and sentence structures that provide varied exposure to English to me as a reader.	4 Students (50%) strongly agree, 3 Students (37,5%) agree, and 1 Student (12,5%) disagree.
6	I realized that Instagram captions use a variety of vocabulary and phrases (formal and informal) that help me understand the use of English in various contexts.	4 Students (50%) strongly agree, and 4 Students (50%) agree.
7	Instagram captions in English influence the improvement of my English reading skills in Extensive Reading activities.	4 Students (50%) strongly agree, and 4 Students (50%) agree.
8	Based on my experience, Instagram captions in English provide better language exposure compared to	2 Students (25%) strongly agree, 5 Students (62,5%) agree, and 1 Student (12,5%) disagree.

	traditional reading materials in Extensive Reading.	
Affective		
9	I enjoy reading Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading activities.	3 Students (37,5%) strongly agree, 4 students (50%) agree, and 1 student (12,5%) disagrees.
10	Reading Instagram captions that match my English skills makes reading activities in Extensive Reading more comfortable and less overwhelming.	5 Students (62,5%) strongly agree, and 3 Students (37,5%) agree.
11	I feel more confident when reading Instagram captions that match my level of understanding.	4 Students (40%) strongly agree, and 4 Students (40%) agree.
12	I feel free to choose Instagram caption topics that interest me for Extensive Reading activities.	6 Students (75%) strongly agree, and 2 Students (25%) agree.
13	I feel more motivated to read when I can choose Instagram captions based on topics that interest me.	6 Students (75%) strongly agree, and 2 Students (25%) agree.
14	Using Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading activities can improve and motivate me to learn English effectively.	5 Students (62,5%) strongly agree, and 3 Students (32,5%) agree.
15	I feel more interested and enthusiastic in Extensive Reading when using Instagram captions compared to traditional reading materials.	4 Students (50%) strongly agree, 2 Students (25%) agree, 1 Student (12,5%) disagrees, and 1 Student (12,5%) strongly disagrees.
Conative		
16	I tend to choose Instagram captions for Extensive Reading activities because I can get new Information and general understanding.	3 Students (37,5%) strongly agree, 3 Students (37,5%) agree, 1 Student (12,5%) disagrees, and 1 Student (12,5%) strongly disagrees.
17	I am motivated to keep reading Instagram captions because I get general	3 Students (37,5%) strongly agree, and 5 Students (62,5%) agree.

	information and understanding from there.	
18	I actively read various kinds of Instagram captions, such as three captions a day, because it enriches my vocabulary.	3 Students (37,5%) strongly agree, 3 Students (37,5%) agree, 1 Student (12,5%) disagrees, and 1 Student (12,5%) strongly disagrees.

The accumulated data from the questionnaire demonstrates that students generally responded positively to the use of Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading. These findings are analyzed further based on the three aspects of perception. First, the cognitive aspect reveals that students' perceptions of using Instagram captions as reading material are generally positive. The majority of students felt that Instagram captions provided clear explanations, aided comprehension, and expanded vocabulary and sentence structure mastery in real-world contexts. This is in line with Astarilla (2018, cited in Fitriani, Kurniawati, & Amuddin, 2024), who found that multimodal texts have a positive effect on reading comprehension, and with Kress & Leeuwen (2020), who emphasize the importance of text meaning. The combination of text and visuals provides additional contexts that strengthen students' understanding, while simple language facilitates the mastery of contextual sentence patterns, as stated by Rosdiani, Mertosono, & Emiwati (2022). This is also in line with Renandya (2017), who emphasizes the importance of easy-to-understand reading material and rich linguistic input in extensive reading. Furthermore, students assessed that Instagram captions contributed to improved reading skills, supporting Rezaee, Farahian, & Mansooji (2020), who found that internet-based multimodal reading materials improve linear text reading skills. The majority of students also agreed that Instagram texts provided broader exposure to English than traditional materials due to their contextual nature, and this exposure was believed to encourage the gradual development of reading skills, in line with Day & Bamford's (2002) view that Extensive Reading provides a large volume of reading that is easy to understand and interesting.

Second, the affective aspects show that the majority of students have a positive perception of the use of Instagram captions as Extensive Reading materials. The questionnaire result revealed that students felt comfortable, happy, and more confident because the reading materials matched their language skills. This finding supports Gandari & Jaya (2024), who emphasize the importance of tailoring reading materials to students' interests to increase motivation, as well as Brown (2008), who stresses that the suitability of reading materials to the readers' level of comprehension is key to the success of Extensive Reading. The freedom to choose caption topics according to their own interests was also considered highly motivating for students, in line with Day & Bamford (2002), who stated that Extensive Reading provides space for students to determine their own reading—in line with this Harmer (2001), emphasized that the success of an extensive reading program depends heavily on students' ability to select and understand appropriate reading materials. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of Instagram captions provides a significant affective boost, increasing students' motivation, interest, and enthusiasm in reading compared to traditional reading materials.

Lastly, the conative aspects also show students' positive perceptions of the use of Instagram captions in Extensive Reading activities. Most students agreed that reading Instagram captions provided an opportunity to obtain new information while understanding the reading content in general, in line with Citra's (2020) explanation that

text plays an important role in general understanding. Students felt encouraged to continue reading because the content was considered relevant, authentic, and easy to understand, in line with Mitrulescu's (2024) explanation that social media could increase motivation to learn languages through contextual information close to everyday life. In addition, several students admitted to reading several Instagram captions every day, which helped enrich their vocabulary. In accordance with Bamford & Day (2004), it is explained that Extensive Reading increases vocabulary through repeated exposure to words and phrases. Thus, the use of Instagram captions not only creates motivation to read consistently but also supports students' vocabulary development.

2. Factors Influencing EFL Students' Perceptions of Reading Instagram Captions as Part of Extensive Reading

The study found that a variety of internal and external factors shape students' perceptions. These factors both play a role in how students view and respond to Instagram captions in the context of extensive reading. First, internal factors include students' experience, motivation, psychological state, and attention when reading Instagram captions. In terms of experience, students preferred captions that aligned with personal interests, such as health, entertainment, politics, and sports, making Extensive Reading activities more enjoyable and meaningful. This aligns with Ali, Palpanadan, Asad, Churi, & Namaziandost (2022), who emphasized that Extensive Reading focuses on the enjoyment of acquiring information. Furthermore, concise Instagram captions make students feel comfortable and less bored, aligning with Day & Bamford's (1998) principle, which emphasizes enjoyment of reading over in-depth analysis. This psychological comfort and sense of enjoyment were clearly reflected in the interview with student 1, who stated:

“During Extensive Reading, I prefer to read Instagram captions because I enjoy it more than reading articles. Instagram also displays content that matches my interests, so reading feels more relevant and fun. The captions I read are usually sports- and health-themed. Although there are some explanations that are not clear, it makes my interest in reading increase because I am encouraged to find out more. Also, because the captions are not too long, I do not get bored quickly, and I do not even feel like I am doing assignments when I read them.” (Interview on 19 July 2025)

Psychological aspects, especially feelings, also influence students' perceptions. Most enjoyed reading engaging captions, although some experienced doubts when understanding difficult topics. This aligns with Day & Bamford's (1998) principle of Extensive Reading, which emphasizes that reading should be enjoyable, engaging, and appropriate to students' linguistic abilities. Motivation also plays a significant role in student perceptions. Some students read Instagram captions due to academic demands, while others are drawn to them because they align with personal interests, as clearly reflected in the interview with student 2, who stated:

“Very influential for me, at that time I thought reading Instagram captions was only used to fill spare time but it turns out that Instagram captions can also be used as learning material, even though Instagram captions are not accounts for learning but because there is English, we as English Education students can learn English from Instagram captions, and not only adrift on academic topics that are on Instagram captions.” (Interview on 20 July 2025)

This statement indicates that initially, students viewed Instagram captions merely as a form of entertainment to pass the time. However, after using them for Extensive Reading

activities, students realized that Instagram captions could also be utilized as a resource for learning English. Students also observed that learning can be derived from various topics available on Instagram, not just from academic content. This finding indicates the presence of intrinsic motivation arising from the students' awareness of their personal interest in utilizing Instagram captions as a learning medium. This finding aligns with Ryan & Deci (2000), who state that intrinsic motivation emerges when an individual engages in an activity perceived as beneficial. Furthermore, the variety of topics available on Instagram allows students to select reading materials based on their own preferences, thereby enhancing their motivation to read.

In addition to motivation, students' engagement with reading materials is also reflected in the way they select reading topics. Based on the interview results, students tend to pay attention to the topics of the reading materials they choose during Extensive Reading activities rather than selecting them randomly, as evidenced by student 2's statement:

"For the Instagram captions I read during the Extensive Reading activity, most of the explanations were clear enough to help me understand the content, even though there were some words I did not know yet. Meanwhile, for less clear captions, the auto-translated feature on Instagram really helped my understanding process. One example of a caption that was easy to understand was a caption discussing a corruption case involving PT Pertamina and its agency. I thought the explanation in the caption was quite clear, not too long, and made it easy for me to understand the content." (Interview on 20 July 2025)



Figure 1: The Instagram caption chosen by a student

The statement and documentation indicate that students actively exercised their freedom to choose reading materials during Extensive Reading activities. The selected caption discussing the PT Pertamina corruption case demonstrates that students paid attention to the content and topic of the reading material rather than choosing materials randomly. This finding is consistent with the principles of Extensive Reading proposed by Day and Bamford (2002), which emphasize that readers should be given the freedom to choose reading materials according to their interests and preferences. Such freedom allows students to become more involved in the reading process and contributes to a more meaningful reading experience.

Lastly, external factors influencing student perceptions include the clarity of Instagram captions and the digital environment. Some students found informative captions especially if clear, they and were coherently structured, and supported by visuals such as images or videos, as Yovita (2020) emphasized that Instagram captions provide context through text

and visuals.



Figure 2: Screenshot of a sport-themed Instagram caption student clearly assessed

However, others felt the information lacked depth and required additional information, and some utilized the automatic translation feature. Documentation shows comprehension of sports-themed captions with relevant visual explanations, reflecting that a good structure can enhance the effectiveness of Extensive Reading. Furthermore, the digital environment also plays a role, with students tending to choose captions based on the number of likes and comments, which are considered to reflect the quality of the content. As student 3 explained:

“Sometimes I choose Instagram captions that I will read for Extensive Reading activities based on the number of likes, especially if there is a topic that is viral, and it makes me read it immediately to find out what the topic is about.” (Interview on 22 July 2025)

This finding suggests that students use social cues available on Instagram when deciding which captions to read. The number of likes and the popularity of a topic influenced their perceptions of the relevance and value of the content. These are findings consistent with Walther (1992), who stated that in digital interactions, users use social cues as a measure of validity. Thus, student perceptions are shaped not only by the content of the caption but also by the surrounding digital social dynamics.

The conclusions of this study are based on two main questions: EFL students' perceptions of the use of Instagram captions as reading material in Extensive Reading, and the factors that influence them. In general, students showed positive perceptions. From a cognitive aspect, Instagram captions helped reading comprehension, enriched vocabulary, and provided authentic English exposure. From an affective aspect, students felt comfortable, interested, and motivated because the topics matched their interests and ability levels. From a conative aspect, they showed a desire to read continuously because they felt they received direct benefits in the form of new information and improved language skills. Furthermore, these perceptions were influenced by internal factors (experience, motivation, psychological state, and attention) and external factors (clarity of caption content and digital environment). Thus, Instagram can be an effective and enjoyable reading alternative in Extensive Reading activities.

CONCLUSION

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