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Master's Students' Perceptions of Instagram for Self-Directed Arabic Learning in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The increasing use of social media has created new opportunities for self-directed language learning beyond formal classrooms. However, little is known about how postgraduate students perceive Instagram as a medium for self-directed Arabic language learning. This study explores master's students' perceptions of Instagram and identifies its perceived benefits and challenges. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed involving master's students in the Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers program at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that students generally perceive Instagram positively because it provides flexible access to authentic learning resources, promotes continuous language exposure, and supports learner autonomy. The platform also enhances vocabulary development, listening skills, motivation, and learning flexibility. Nevertheless, digital distractions, fragmented learning content, and varying content quality remain significant challenges, highlighting the importance of self-regulation and digital literacy. This study demonstrates that Instagram's educational value lies in fostering learner autonomy and provides practical insights for integrating social media into Arabic language learning in the AI era.

Keywords: *Instagram; self-directed learning; Arabic language learning; learner autonomy; digital literacy*

Abstrak

Meningkatnya penggunaan media sosial telah membuka peluang baru bagi pembelajaran bahasa secara mandiri di luar kelas formal. Namun, kajian mengenai persepsi mahasiswa pascasarjana terhadap penggunaan Instagram dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab secara mandiri masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa magister terhadap penggunaan Instagram serta mengidentifikasi manfaat dan tantangan yang mereka rasakan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan mahasiswa Program Magister *Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers* di International Islamic University Malaysia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap Instagram karena menyediakan akses yang fleksibel terhadap sumber belajar autentik, memperluas paparan bahasa, dan mendukung otonomi belajar. Instagram juga membantu meningkatkan kosakata, keterampilan menyimak, motivasi, dan fleksibilitas belajar. Namun, distraksi digital, materi yang tidak sistematis, dan variasi kualitas konten masih menjadi tantangan utama sehingga regulasi diri dan literasi digital menjadi faktor penting. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa nilai edukatif Instagram terletak pada kemampuannya mendukung otonomi belajar serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi integrasi media sosial dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab di era AI.

Kata Kunci: *Instagram; self-directed learning; pembelajaran bahasa Arab; otonomi pembelajar; literasi digital*

Introduction

The development of education in the twenty-first century requires students not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop the ability to manage their own learning processes independently. As educational paradigms shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches, self-directed learning (SDL) has become a fundamental competency in higher education.¹ Through SDL, students are expected to identify their learning needs, establish learning goals, select appropriate learning resources, implement effective learning strategies, and evaluate their learning outcomes independently. These competencies provide the foundation for lifelong learning, which has become increasingly essential in response to the rapid advancement of knowledge and technology.

¹ Dizon, Gilbert. "ChatGPT as a Tool for Self-Directed Foreign Language Learning." *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, October 9, 2024, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2024.2413406>.

In the context of Arabic language learning, the importance of self-directed learning is even more pronounced. Arabic possesses complex linguistic features across phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, requiring continuous practice beyond formal classroom instruction.² Classroom learning alone is often insufficient to support the development of comprehensive language proficiency. Consequently, learners' ability to engage in independent learning is essential for continuously improving their language skills through a wide range of available learning resources.³

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly expanded access to learning resources that support self-directed learning. Internet connectivity, mobile devices, and various digital platforms enable students to learn anytime and anywhere without temporal or geographical constraints. These technologies also provide flexible, interactive, and personalized learning experiences.⁴ In this context, social media has evolved beyond its traditional role as a communication tool to become a learning environment that facilitates knowledge sharing, collaboration, and autonomous learning.

Among social media platforms, Instagram has emerged as one of the most widely used tools for language learning. Its features, including image posts, short videos (Reels), Stories, Live sessions, and interactive communication through comments and direct messages, allow language learning materials to be delivered in engaging and accessible formats.⁵ The platform's visual and audiovisual characteristics can enhance learners' motivation while providing authentic language exposure through educational content creators. Previous studies have

² Hamed Sedghi, Soheyla Mohseny nejad, Seyyed Adnan Eshkevari, Pouran Rezaei choshali, and Hossein Talebzadeh. "Identifying the Speaking Proficiency Level of Arabic Learners in Accordance with the International Guidelines of ACTFL for Assessing Proficiency in Foreign Languages." *Research in Arabic Language* 12, no. 25 (January 2020): 1–22.

³ Rosell-Aguilar, Fernando. "Autonomous Language Learning through a Mobile Application: A User Evaluation of the *Busuu* App." *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 31, no. 8 (November 2018): 854–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1456465>.

⁴ Zou, Di, Yan Huang, and Haoran Xie. "Digital Game-Based Vocabulary Learning: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?" *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 34, nos. 5–6 (July 2021): 751–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1640745>.

⁵ Lee, Yeong-Ju. *Social Media and Language Learning*. London: Routledge, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003543541>.

demonstrated that Instagram supports vocabulary acquisition,⁶ enhances learning motivation,⁷ strengthens language skills, and promotes learner autonomy.⁸ These findings suggest that Instagram has considerable potential to facilitate self-directed learning in language education.

Meanwhile, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, has transformed the digital learning landscape. AI-powered applications can provide instant explanations, personalized feedback, adaptive learning exercises, and real-time learning support.⁹ Nevertheless, AI has not replaced the educational role of social media. Platforms such as Instagram continue to offer distinctive advantages through authentic user-generated content, social interaction, learning communities, and experiential learning that cannot be fully replicated by AI systems. Therefore, in the AI era, Instagram remains a relevant platform for supporting self-directed learning, particularly in Arabic language education.

Research on Instagram in language learning has consistently highlighted its potential as an informal learning environment. Gomes Junior (2020) found that Instagram-based language learning communities function as personal learning networks, fostering learner autonomy, interaction, openness, and diverse learning experiences while contributing to learners' linguistic competence, identity development, and motivation.¹⁰ Similarly, Ebadi et al. (2024) reported that behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement in Instagram-mediated language learning positively influences second-language learning motivation, with

⁶ Çakmak, Fidel. “Social Networking and Language Learning.” In *Research Anthology on Applying Social Networking Strategies to Classrooms and Libraries*, 814–35. IGI Global, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7123-4.ch044>.

⁷ Aghayi, Amir Allan, and MaryAnn Christison. “Instagram as a Tool for Professional Learning.” In *Research Anthology on Applying Social Networking Strategies to Classrooms and Libraries*, 686–703. IGI Global, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7123-4.ch037>.

⁸ Aslan, Erhan, and Mukaddas Butabaeva Sirojiddinovna. “Language Learning Made Short and Sweet? Exploring Student Perceptions of Microcelebrity Teacher Reels on Instagram.” *Linguistics and Education* 88 (August 2025): 101430. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2025.101430>.

⁹ Humairoh, Sitti Wardatul, Nurul Hadi, and Umi Hanifah. “The AI Revolution in Arabic Language Learning: An Analysis of ChatGPT’s Role in Autonomous Learning.” *Alibbaa’: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 7, no. 1 (January 2026): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v7i1.22479>.

¹⁰ Gomes Junior, Ronaldo Corrêa. “Instanarratives: Stories of Foreign Language Learning on Instagram.” *System* 94 (November 2020): 102330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102330>.

cognitive engagement serving as the strongest predictor.¹¹ Furthermore, Jiang and Zhao (2025) demonstrated that Instagram-based vocabulary learning enhances not only vocabulary acquisition but also motivation, growth mindset, willingness to communicate, and learning enjoyment, reinforcing the pedagogical value of social media in language education.¹²

Despite these contributions, previous studies have primarily examined Instagram's effects on motivation, learner engagement, and language learning outcomes, whereas its relationship with the principles of self-directed learning remains underexplored. Uştuk (2024) argued that the success of learner-centered language education depends primarily on learners' capacity to manage their own learning rather than on technology itself.¹³ This perspective suggests that the effectiveness of digital learning environments relies largely on learners' autonomy and self-regulation. Likewise, Lee (2025) emphasized that Instagram and other social media platforms have become integral components of the contemporary language learning ecosystem, requiring learners to integrate diverse learning resources independently.¹⁴ Consequently, there remains a need to investigate how postgraduate students perceive Instagram as a medium for self-directed Arabic language learning, including the benefits and challenges they experience in this context.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores master's students' perceptions of Instagram as a medium for self-directed learning in Arabic language education. It also examines the perceived benefits of using Instagram while identifying the challenges students encounter when utilizing the platform for independent learning. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of technology-enhanced

¹¹ Ebadi, Saman, Maryam Zandi, and Zahra Fakher Ajabshir. "The Effect of Language Learning Engagement on L2 Motivation over Instagram." *Acta Psychologica* 250 (October 2024): 104512. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104512>.

¹² Jiang, Shaohua, and Hongyan Zhao. "Learning English Vocabulary via Instagram or YouTube: Surveying the Impacts on Motivation, Growth Mindfulness, Willingness to Communicate, and Enjoyment from the Lens of Self-Determination Theory." *Learning and Motivation* 89 (February 2025): 102089. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2024.102089>.

¹³ Uştuk, Özgehan. "Getting Puzzled about Puzzling: Doing My First Exploratory Practice on Self-Directed English Language Learning." *Language Teaching Research*, ahead of print, June 6, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688241254991>.

¹⁴ Lee, Yeong-Ju. *Social Media and Language Learning*. London: Routledge, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003543541>.

Arabic language learning strategies and provide a foundation for future research on integrating social media and AI technologies to support more effective language learning.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a descriptive-exploratory design to investigate master's students' perceptions of Instagram as a platform for self-directed Arabic language learning.¹⁵ A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the use of Instagram in supporting their independent learning practices rather than measuring the effectiveness of the platform quantitatively. Conducted at the International Islamic University Malaysia, the study focused on postgraduate students enrolled in the Arabic language program, where independent learning is regarded as an essential component of academic development.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. Eligible participants were master's students who had experience using Instagram as part of their self-directed Arabic language learning activities. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information from individuals who were familiar with the phenomenon under investigation and capable of providing meaningful insights into their learning experiences.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their views and experiences openly while ensuring that all key research topics were adequately explored. The interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of Instagram, the perceived benefits of the platform in facilitating self-directed Arabic language learning, and the challenges they encountered during its use. All interviews were conducted with the participants' informed consent, recorded with their permission, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of the collected data.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes that reflected participants'

¹⁵ John W. Creswell, and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. 5th ed. SAGE Publications, Inc, 2023.

perceptions and experiences.¹⁶ The analysis involved repeated reading of the transcripts, systematic coding of meaningful data segments, grouping similar codes into broader categories, and developing themes that addressed the research objectives. Throughout the analytical process, the researcher continuously compared the emerging themes with the original interview data to ensure that the interpretations accurately represented the participants' perspectives.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher maintain consistency throughout the data collection and analysis processes and carefully reviewed the coding and thematic interpretations to minimize subjective bias. Participants' identities were kept confidential by using pseudonyms or participant codes, and all data were treated anonymously. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process to ensure respect for participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of interview data collected from ten master's students enrolled in the Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers program at the International Islamic University Malaysia generated two major themes. The first theme captures students' perceptions of Instagram as a medium for self-directed Arabic learning, while the second explores the perceived benefits and challenges of using the platform for independent Arabic language learning. Overall, participants expressed positive perceptions of Instagram, attributing these views to its ease of use, compatibility with self-directed learning, and the availability of diverse Arabic learning content. At the same time, they identified several benefits that support Arabic language development, as well as challenges that should be addressed to maximize the platform's educational potential.

Students' Perceptions of Instagram for Self-Directed Arabic Learning

The thematic analysis revealed that master's students generally held positive perceptions of Instagram as a platform for self-directed

¹⁶ Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Arabic learning. Three interrelated themes emerged from the data: the platform's ease of use, its suitability for supporting self-directed learning, and the quality of Arabic learning content available on Instagram. Together, these themes explain why participants considered Instagram an appropriate digital platform for learning Arabic beyond the formal classroom.

The first theme concerns the platform's ease of use. Nearly all participants described Instagram as user-friendly, easily accessible, and already integrated into their daily digital activities. Their familiarity with the application's interface enabled them to use Instagram for independent learning with minimal difficulty. Moreover, the platform's emphasis on visual content, short-form videos, and intuitive navigation made the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable. Several participants also emphasized that Instagram's effectiveness as a learning tool depends largely on how it is used. They viewed it as an appropriate platform for Arabic language learning when used intentionally and guided by clear learning objectives. For many participants, this ease of use was one of the primary reasons for choosing Instagram as a medium for self-directed learning.

The second theme highlights Instagram's compatibility with the principles of self-directed learning. Participants explained that the platform allows them to choose learning materials that match their interests and needs, follow educational accounts relevant to their learning goals, and access content anytime and anywhere. This flexibility enables learners to organize their learning according to their abilities, preferences, and objectives. Unlike formal classroom instruction, Instagram also allows users to revisit previously viewed content, facilitating repeated practice whenever necessary. These features reinforce the perception that Instagram functions not only as a social networking platform but also as a learning environment that promotes learner autonomy.

The third theme relates to the quality of Arabic learning content available on Instagram. Although participants generally appreciated the abundance of educational materials, they recognized that content quality varies considerably across accounts. Differences in creators' academic backgrounds, teaching experience, and language expertise influence the accuracy and reliability of the information provided. Consequently, most participants emphasized the importance of selecting accounts managed by qualified Arabic language educators or professionals to ensure the credibility of learning materials. In other words, Instagram's educational

value depends not only on the platform itself but also on learners' ability to evaluate and select trustworthy learning resources.

Overall, the findings indicate that master's students regard Instagram as a valuable platform for self-directed Arabic learning. Their positive perceptions are shaped by its accessibility, flexibility, and extensive range of educational content. At the same time, participants demonstrated critical awareness by recognizing that meaningful learning experiences depend on their ability to identify reliable sources. These findings suggest that Instagram has evolved beyond a social networking application into a digital learning resource capable of supporting independent Arabic language learning when used purposefully and selectively.

Benefits and Challenges of Instagram for Self-Directed Arabic Learning

Beyond exploring students' perceptions, this study also examined the benefits and challenges they experienced while using Instagram as a medium for self-directed Arabic learning. The thematic analysis indicates that students' experiences were influenced not only by the platform's technical features but also by the quality of its educational content and their ability to regulate their own learning. Overall, participants perceived the benefits to outweigh the challenges, although they acknowledged several limitations that should be considered to optimize the platform's educational use.

Participants identified several ways in which Instagram supports self-directed Arabic learning. One of the most frequently mentioned benefits was its contribution to vocabulary development through concise, contextualized, and easily understandable learning materials. In addition, videos produced by native speakers and Arabic language educators were perceived to enhance listening skills, particularly in understanding pronunciation, intonation, and authentic language use in everyday communication. Participants also noted that learning materials presented through images, infographics, and short videos made learning more engaging and encouraged them to study more consistently than when relying solely on conventional learning resources.

In addition to improving language skills, participants emphasized Instagram's flexibility in supporting independent learning. They appreciated the ability to access learning materials whenever convenient, review content repeatedly, and select resources appropriate to their proficiency levels and learning needs. Such flexibility was considered a defining feature of self-directed learning because it enables learners to

exercise greater control over their learning processes. Several participants also noted that the diversity of available content exposed them to multiple learning resources, reducing dependence on a single textbook or instructor. This variety contributed to higher learning motivation by providing richer and more dynamic learning experiences aligned with contemporary digital practices.

Despite these advantages, participants also identified several challenges associated with using Instagram for self-directed learning. The most frequently reported issue was distraction caused by the abundance of entertainment content on the platform. Instagram's algorithm simultaneously presents educational and non-educational content, making it difficult for learners to maintain focus while studying Arabic. Participants also observed that educational materials on Instagram are often fragmented and lack a systematic learning sequence. As a result, beginner learners may struggle to develop coherent and progressive understanding if they rely exclusively on Instagram as their primary learning resource.

Another major challenge concerns the varying quality of educational content. Participants acknowledged that not all educational accounts are managed by individuals with expertise in Arabic language education, making the accuracy of some materials questionable. They also identified limited interaction with instructors, dependence on internet connectivity, and difficulties in verifying the credibility of content creators as factors that may reduce learning effectiveness. Accordingly, participants emphasized the importance of digital literacy, including the ability to evaluate information critically, select credible educational accounts, and complement Instagram with more structured learning resources to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that master's students perceive Instagram as a valuable platform for supporting self-directed Arabic learning by enhancing learning motivation, expanding vocabulary, improving listening skills, and providing flexible access to learning resources. Nevertheless, its educational effectiveness depends largely on learners' ability to manage distractions, evaluate the credibility of learning sources, and integrate Instagram into a more structured learning strategy. These findings suggest that the successful use of Instagram in Arabic language learning is determined not only by the platform's technological features but also by learners' readiness to engage with digital technologies critically and responsibly.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that master's students enrolled in the Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers program perceive Instagram as an effective platform for supporting self-directed Arabic learning. Their positive perceptions are shaped not merely by the platform's ease of use but, more importantly, by its capacity to provide learners with the autonomy to access learning resources, select materials that match their needs, and manage their learning independently. At the same time, the findings reveal that the educational effectiveness of Instagram depends on learners' ability to identify credible learning resources, manage digital distractions, and develop digital literacy. These findings suggest that the successful use of social media in Arabic language learning is influenced more by learner characteristics than by the technology itself.

The positive perceptions identified in this study can be interpreted through the perspective of self-directed learning (SDL), which places learner autonomy at the center of the learning process. From this perspective, technology is not an end in itself but a means of enabling learners to make independent decisions regarding what to learn, how to learn, and which learning resources to use. Instagram provides these opportunities by offering convenient access, flexibility in time and place, and freedom to choose learning content according to individual needs.¹⁷ Consequently, students use Instagram not merely as a social networking platform but as a learning environment that extends learning opportunities beyond the classroom. This finding supports Knowles' view that self-directed learning flourishes when learners are given control over their own learning processes.

The present study also extends previous research on Instagram in language learning. Earlier studies have primarily emphasized its influence on learner motivation, engagement, and the platform's visual appeal. In contrast, the present findings indicate that students' positive perceptions stem from the alignment between Instagram's characteristics

¹⁷ Teng, Chunyan, Tahereh Heydarnejad, Md. Kamrul Hasan, Abdulfattah Omar, and Leeda Sarabani. "Mobile Assisted Language Learning in Learning English through Social Networking Tools: An Account of Instagram Feed-Based Tasks on Learning Grammar and Attitude among English as a Foreign Language Learners." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (September 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1012004>.

and the principles of self-directed learning.¹⁸ Therefore, Instagram's primary educational contribution lies not only in enhancing learning motivation but also in fostering learner autonomy, particularly among postgraduate students who are expected to demonstrate a higher level of academic independence.

Furthermore, the benefits reported by participants indicate that Instagram possesses pedagogical value beyond its function as a social networking platform. It provides continuous language exposure through learning content that can be accessed anytime, allowing students to remain engaged with Arabic outside formal instructional settings.¹⁹ Such sustained exposure has the potential to strengthen vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and understanding of authentic language use in real-life contexts. Consequently, Instagram not only broadens access to learning resources but also creates an environment in which language learning can occur more naturally and continuously.²⁰

The concise, visual, and easily accessible nature of Instagram content also aligns well with the principles of microlearning. For postgraduate students with demanding academic schedules, this learning model enables flexible engagement through short but continuous learning units.²¹ Accordingly, Instagram's effectiveness lies not simply in its technological features but in its ability to integrate learning into learners' daily routines. In this regard, Instagram serves as a complement to formal instruction that supports lifelong learning rather than as a substitute for classroom-based education.

¹⁸ Lai, Yuzhi, Nadira Saab, and Wilfried Admiraal. "Factors Influencing University Students' Persistence and Satisfaction Towards Self-Directed Language Learning Using Mobile Technology." *Behavioral Sciences* 16, no. 4 (March 2026): 519. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs16040519>.

¹⁹ Jiang, Shaohua, and Hongyan Zhao. "Learning English Vocabulary via Instagram or YouTube: Surveying the Impacts on Motivation, Growth Mindfulness, Willingness to Communicate, and Enjoyment from the Lens of Self-Determination Theory." *Learning and Motivation* 89 (February 2025): 102089. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2024.102089>.

²⁰ Widarti, Hayuni Retno, Deni Ainur Rokhim, Sri Yamtinah, Ari Syahidul Shidiq, and Allykha Baharsyah. "Instagram-Based Learning Media: Improving Student Motivation and Learning Outcomes in Reaction Rate." *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 1 (January 2024): 165–82. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i1.957>.

²¹ Merayo, Noemi, Alba Ayuso-Lanchares, and Clara González-Sanguino. "Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing to Assess the Emotional Impact of Influencers' Mental Health Content on Instagram." *PeerJ Computer Science* 10 (September 2024): e2251. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs.2251>.

Despite these advantages, the findings also reveal several challenges associated with using Instagram for language learning. Notably, most of these challenges arise not from technological limitations but from learners' ability to regulate their own learning. Digital distractions, fragmented learning materials, and variations in content quality indicate that while social media offers considerable learning freedom, it simultaneously demands greater learner responsibility.²² In other words, the greater the autonomy provided by a learning platform, the stronger the self-regulation required to use it effectively.

These findings further suggest that digital literacy is a fundamental prerequisite for successful self-directed learning. Digital literacy extends beyond the technical ability to operate digital tools; it also encompasses the capacity to evaluate the credibility of information sources, filter information critically, manage distractions, and use digital media purposefully to achieve learning objectives.²³ Therefore, the success of Arabic language learning through social media depends not only on access to technology but also on learners' ability to engage with technology critically and responsibly.²⁴

The implications of these findings become even more significant in the era of artificial intelligence (AI). Language learning is no longer confined to a single platform but takes place within a digital ecosystem that integrates social media, learning applications, search engines, and AI-powered systems. Within this ecosystem, the competencies identified in this study, including the ability to evaluate the credibility of learning resources, manage learning independently, and critically assess

²² Timmi, Mohamed, Loubna Laaouina, Adil Jeghal, Said el Garouani, and Ali Yahyaouy. "Comparative Evaluation of YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram as Online Learning Resources." *2024 International Conference on Intelligent Systems and Computer Vision (ISCV)*, May 8, 2024, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ISCV60512.2024.10620142>.

²³ Schildhauer, Peter, and Katharina Kemper. "6 Towards a Critical Digital Literacy Framework: Exploring the Impact of Algorithms in the Creation of Filter Bubbles on Instagram." In *Born-Digital Texts in the English Language Classroom*, 89–105. Multilingual Matters, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800414815-007>.

²⁴ Al-Abdullatif, Ahlam Mohammed, and Merfat Ayeshe Alsubaie. "Using Digital Learning Platforms for Teaching Arabic Literacy: A Post-Pandemic Mobile Learning Scenario in Saudi Arabia." *Sustainability* 14, no. 19 (September 2022): 11868. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141911868>.

information, remain essential foundations for successful learning.²⁵ Although AI can accelerate access to information and provide personalized feedback, it does not eliminate the need for learner autonomy or independent decision-making.²⁶

Overall, this study suggests that technological transformation has not diminished the importance of self-directed learning; rather, it has reinforced its significance. Instagram and AI should not be viewed as competing approaches but as complementary components of a broader digital learning ecosystem. While Instagram offers authentic and continuous language exposure, AI provides adaptive and personalized learning support. However, the educational potential of both technologies can only be fully realized when learners possess sufficient autonomy and digital literacy. Therefore, fostering self-directed learning should remain a central priority in Arabic language education to enable students to utilize emerging digital technologies effectively, critically, and sustainably.

Conclusion

This study explored master's students' perceptions of Instagram for self-directed Arabic learning and identified the perceived benefits and challenges of using the platform. The findings reveal that students generally perceive Instagram positively because it provides flexible access to authentic learning resources, supports autonomous learning, and facilitates continuous language exposure beyond the classroom. At the same time, the effectiveness of Instagram depends not only on the platform itself but also on learners' ability to regulate their learning, evaluate the credibility of digital content, and manage online distractions. These findings suggest that the educational value of Instagram lies in its capacity to foster learner autonomy rather than merely serving as a social media platform. By interpreting Instagram through the lens of *self-directed learning*, this study contributes to a

²⁵ A. Gazali, Nihayatur Rahmah, Roychan Yasin, Muhammad Ridwan, and Alya Raihana Sari. "Arabic for Specific Purposes in Islamic Higher Education: Systemic Learning Challenges among Non-Pesantren Students." *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 7, no. 1 (February 2026): 370–91. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v7i1.23592>.

²⁶ Zaimah, Nely Rahmawati, Risti Kamila Wening Estu, Syarifatul Fitri Hidayah, Syamsul Hadi, and Aiden Button. "Harnessing Gemini for Arabic Mastery: Educators' and Learners' Views." *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 5, no. 2 (July 2024): 166–88. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v5i2.14808>.

deeper understanding of how social media can support Arabic language learning in an increasingly digital educational environment.

The findings have practical implications for Arabic language educators and curriculum developers by highlighting the importance of integrating social media into formal learning while simultaneously strengthening students' self-directed learning and digital literacy skills. Such competencies are becoming increasingly essential as language learning expands into broader digital ecosystems, including AI-supported learning environments. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its relatively small sample size and its focus on master's students from a single institution, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research could involve more diverse participants across educational levels and countries, employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs, and examine how social media and AI-powered learning tools can be integrated to support more effective self-directed Arabic language learning.

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