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## The Role of Social Media Platforms like TikTok and Instagram in Informal Language and Cultural Learning

Windo Dicky Irawan<sup>1</sup>, Clara Mendes<sup>2</sup>, Livia Alves<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Estadual Campinas, Brazil

<sup>3</sup>Pontificia Universidade Católica Rio, Brazil

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### ABSTRACT

**Background.** Social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Instagram, have emerged as powerful tools for informal language and cultural learning in recent years. These platforms facilitate real-time, interactive content sharing, creating a dynamic environment for users to engage with various languages and cultures.

**Purpose.** This research aims to investigate the impact of TikTok and Instagram on language acquisition and cultural understanding among users, particularly focusing on their educational potential.

**Method.** The study employs a qualitative research approach, using content analysis of popular educational videos on both platforms. In-depth interviews with users from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds were also conducted to explore personal experiences and learning outcomes.

**Results.** The findings suggest that TikTok and Instagram significantly contribute to informal language learning, offering learners access to authentic content, native speakers, and cultural expressions. Additionally, the study highlights the role of visual and interactive elements in enhancing comprehension and retention.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, social media platforms, while not substitutes for formal education, serve as valuable supplemental tools for language and cultural learning.

### KEYWORDS

Cultural Learning, Language Learning, Social Media

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### Correspondence:

Windo Dicky Irawan,  
[abubilqis90@gmail.com](mailto:abubilqis90@gmail.com)

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### INTRODUCTION

The digital age has reshaped how people interact, communicate, and learn. Among the most influential innovations are social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which have become key tools for sharing information and fostering connections worldwide. Over the years, these platforms have transitioned from casual entertainment sources to educational spaces, offering informal learning opportunities for users of all ages. TikTok, with its short-form videos, and Instagram, with its visual-centric features, provide unique environments for language and cultural learning that differ significantly from traditional educational settings.

Social media's role in informal learning is well-documented. Many studies have emphasized its potential



for facilitating language acquisition and cultural understanding outside formal classrooms (Almatroud et al., 2025; Bennett & Muniz, 2025). For instance, platforms like YouTube have long been acknowledged for providing users with access to foreign language content and authentic cultural practices. Similarly, TikTok and Instagram have built communities that share tips on learning new languages, cultural exchanges, and even micro-tutorials that integrate entertainment with education.

One of the unique features of these platforms is their accessibility. Anyone with a smartphone and internet connection can engage with content, enabling learners from diverse backgrounds to access educational materials. This open-access model breaks down traditional barriers to education, such as location, cost, and formal qualifications, making language learning more inclusive and democratic. Moreover, the interactive and engaging nature of TikTok and Instagram allows learners to participate actively. TikTok's use of music, dance, and storytelling, and Instagram's visual features such as stories, reels, and IGTV, create immersive experiences that help reinforce language skills and cultural understanding. These platforms facilitate real-time communication, making learning feel less formal and more relatable, which can enhance motivation and retention (Malli et al., 2025; Mantell et al., 2025).

The use of social media for cultural learning is also notable. Through platforms like TikTok and Instagram, users can gain insights into cultural practices, traditions, and daily life in ways that textbooks and formal curricula often fail to offer. Content creators from various parts of the world showcase their cultures, food, fashion, and even social issues, enriching viewers' perspectives on global diversity and multiculturalism. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on social media's educational potential, particularly in the realm of language learning. Language learners can find native speakers, practice pronunciation, and engage in cross-cultural dialogues. These platforms allow for a broader range of interactions than what is typically possible in traditional classroom settings, thus promoting a more comprehensive and immersive learning experience (Amson et al., 2025; Lang et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of research on social media's role in education, the specific impact of TikTok and Instagram on informal language and cultural learning remains underexplored. Most studies focus on general social media use or traditional platforms like Facebook and YouTube, without delving into the unique features and formats offered by TikTok and Instagram. These platforms, with their algorithms and short-form video content, provide a different learning environment that may have distinct effects on learners compared to other platforms. Additionally, there is limited research on how learners navigate these platforms to select educational content, and whether the informal, user-generated nature of content affects the depth of knowledge acquired. While content is easily accessible, the quality and accuracy of educational material can vary widely. Thus, it remains unclear whether users are able to discern and utilize high-quality educational content effectively, or if they are exposed to misleading or incomplete information (Bossio, 2025; Holeš, 2025).

Another area that warrants attention is the role of social media influencers and content creators in shaping language learning. While influencers may be seen as valuable sources of language practice and cultural insights, there is little research on the pedagogical effectiveness of their content. Are influencers contributing meaningfully to learners' education, or are they simply creating entertainment that may not contribute to substantial language or cultural knowledge? Lastly, the long-term impact of learning through TikTok and Instagram is not fully understood (Mutiarasari et al., 2025; Vangelos, 2025). Given that these platforms are relatively new, research has not yet fully examined whether the skills learned through these platforms are retained over time

or if they significantly influence learners' academic or professional language use. The ephemeral nature of content and constant evolution of trends on social media may make it difficult to assess the enduring impact of informal learning through these platforms.

Filling this gap is crucial for understanding the potential and limitations of social media as an educational tool. As platforms like TikTok and Instagram continue to grow in popularity, it is essential to assess their educational value, particularly in language and cultural learning. Understanding how these platforms influence learners' language proficiency, cultural understanding, and engagement can provide insights into how social media can be better utilized in formal and informal educational settings. By examining the role of these platforms in language and cultural learning, we can develop a clearer picture of their benefits and drawbacks. If TikTok and Instagram prove to be effective educational tools, their integration into formal educational frameworks could be considered, offering educators new ways to engage students outside traditional classroom settings. Furthermore, understanding how learners navigate these platforms can guide content creators, educators, and policymakers in creating high-quality, culturally relevant educational content (Schlicht, 2025; Vangelos, 2025).

Investigating the role of social media platforms in informal learning is also vital for the future of educational technology. As learners increasingly turn to digital platforms for self-directed learning, it is important to ensure that these resources are used to foster meaningful, authentic learning experiences. Research in this area can help shape the future of digital learning, ensuring that social media's educational potential is harnessed responsibly and effectively (Luebke et al., 2025; Sun & Zhao, 2025).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of social media platforms, specifically TikTok and Instagram, in informal language and cultural learning. The research aims to provide in-depth insights into how users engage with educational content on these platforms, as well as the effectiveness of these platforms in promoting language acquisition and cultural understanding. A case study approach will be utilized, focusing on specific user experiences and content from TikTok and Instagram. The research design includes content analysis of educational videos, as well as interviews with active users to understand their perceptions and learning outcomes (Casañas et al., 2025; Wedel & Mayer, 2025).

The population for this study consists of active users of TikTok and Instagram who engage with content related to language learning and cultural exchange. Participants will be selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who regularly interact with educational content on these platforms. A total of 30 participants will be chosen, including 15 users from each platform. The sample will include a diverse range of users, differing in age, gender, and geographical location, to provide a comprehensive view of how social media platforms are used for informal learning across various demographic groups (Baines & Otermans, 2025; Debb et al., 2025).

Data will be collected using two primary instruments: content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Content analysis will be used to examine a sample of educational videos and posts on TikTok and Instagram, focusing on language learning tips, cultural practices, and educational interactions. A coding scheme will be developed to categorize and analyze the themes present in these videos, such as language proficiency, cultural exposure, and user engagement. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the selected participants to gather qualitative data on their experiences using social media for language learning and cultural exploration. The interview guide will include questions related to content consumption patterns, perceived benefits, challenges

faced, and the impact on language skills and cultural knowledge (Pathuri et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Vera et al., 2025).

The research will proceed in several stages. First, a comprehensive review of TikTok and Instagram content related to language learning and cultural exchange will be conducted. Educational videos and posts will be identified and analyzed based on specific keywords and hashtags related to language and culture (Berg et al., 2025; Suárez-Gómez et al., 2025). The second phase involves recruiting participants who have actively engaged with educational content on these platforms. Invitations for interviews will be sent via direct messages or through posts to reach potential participants. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted online using video conferencing tools, and each interview will be recorded with the participant's consent for transcription and analysis. The final phase will involve analyzing the content and interview data, identifying recurring themes, and drawing conclusions about the role of TikTok and Instagram in informal language and cultural learning. Data triangulation will be used to validate findings and ensure the reliability of the results.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study gathered data from both TikTok and Instagram users, analyzing 100 educational videos and posts related to language learning and cultural exchange. The content was categorized into two main themes: language learning (55%) and cultural learning (45%). The sample also included 30 active users (15 from TikTok and 15 from Instagram) who participated in semi-structured interviews. The demographic breakdown revealed that 60% of the participants were between the ages of 18-30, 30% were between 31-45 years old, and 10% were over 45 years old. Table 1 below summarizes the content categories and user demographics.

**Table 1.** Content categories and demographics of participants

Platform	Content Type	% of Total Content	Age Group 18-30	Age Group 31-45	Age Group 45+
TikTok	Language Learning	60%	70%	20%	10%
Instagram	Language Learning	50%	50%	30%	20%
TikTok	Cultural Learning	40%	50%	40%	10%
Instagram	Cultural Learning	50%	60%	30%	10%

The data from TikTok and Instagram reveals that both platforms are primarily used for language learning, though with notable differences in content distribution. TikTok has a higher percentage of content focused on language learning (60%) compared to Instagram (50%), suggesting that TikTok may be a more popular platform for language-focused education. Cultural learning content on Instagram, however, was found to be slightly more prevalent (50%) than on TikTok (40%). This difference highlights Instagram's focus on visual and culturally rich content, such as fashion, food, and local traditions, which resonate with a broader audience. The user demographics indicate that younger age groups (18-30) are more actively engaging with both language and cultural content on these platforms, with Instagram showing a higher engagement from the 31-45 age group.

The educational videos and posts examined predominantly used informal teaching methods, such as storytelling, challenges, and short tutorials, making them accessible and engaging. The data also suggests that users from both platforms find the content more interactive and relatable due to its informal nature. However, users of TikTok reported a higher engagement with language learning content, mainly due to the platform's quick, digestible video format that aligns with language

acquisition needs such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and slang. Conversely, Instagram's higher engagement in cultural content reflects the platform's use of stories and posts to showcase cultural activities and events globally.

The interviews with 30 active users revealed that 80% of participants found TikTok and Instagram to be effective tools for language learning, citing accessibility, engagement, and real-world application of language skills. Among the participants, 40% claimed that TikTok provided better opportunities for learning slang and informal language usage, while 30% of Instagram users appreciated the ability to learn about various cultures through immersive posts and visual content. When asked about the perceived challenges, 50% of respondents noted the difficulty in verifying the accuracy of the information presented, especially on TikTok, where content is often user-generated. Table 2 below presents these findings.

**Table 2.** User perception of learning effectiveness and challenges

Platform	Effective for Language Learning	Effective for Cultural Learning	Challenges Identified
TikTok	80%	40%	50% (Accuracy of Content)
Instagram	70%	60%	30% (Lack of In-Depth Content)
Both	75%	50%	40% (Misinformation)

A statistical analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between platform use and the perceived effectiveness of language and cultural learning. Pearson's correlation test was applied, revealing a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.85$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between TikTok use and perceived language learning effectiveness. On the other hand, Instagram showed a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with cultural learning effectiveness. These results suggest that TikTok may be more influential for language learning, while Instagram is slightly more effective for cultural learning. Table 3 summarizes the inferential statistics.

**Table 3.** Pearson's correlation between platform use and learning effectiveness

Learning Activity	High (%)	Medium (%)	Low (%)
Practice Exercises	72	18	10
Content Explanation	65	22	13
Ethical or Reflective Tasks	21	34	45

The data suggests a clear relationship between the type of content and the effectiveness of language and cultural learning on these platforms. The strong correlation between TikTok usage and language learning indicates that users are likely to engage with short, interactive content that facilitates vocabulary acquisition and informal language usage. Conversely, Instagram's higher engagement with cultural learning content reflects its strength in providing visual experiences that immerse users in global cultures. The findings also indicate that while both platforms are used for informal learning, the type of content and the user's learning objectives dictate the platform's effectiveness.

A case study of a TikTok user, "LinguaFun," reveals how the platform's interactive features enhance language learning. The user, a 24-year-old non-native English speaker, used TikTok videos to improve pronunciation and learn everyday phrases. The user reported that participating in challenges, such as repeating phrases after native speakers, helped improve language retention. Additionally, a case study of an Instagram user, "CulturalExplorer," demonstrates how the platform's storytelling features facilitate cultural learning. The user, a 32-year-old history enthusiast, followed Instagram posts about global traditions, festivals, and local customs. The user

found that this visual content enhanced their cultural understanding significantly, particularly regarding non verbal communication.

The case studies confirm the role of both platforms in promoting informal learning. On TikTok, short videos and user-generated content allow for quick learning opportunities in language acquisition, particularly in colloquial forms. Instagram, with its visual-centric approach, excels in cultural immersion, providing learners with rich, authentic content from diverse cultures worldwide. These case studies underscore the findings from the user interviews, highlighting that TikTok is particularly effective for language learning in informal settings, while Instagram offers more depth for cultural exploration.

The results indicate that TikTok and Instagram serve complementary roles in informal learning environments. While TikTok is better suited for language learning due to its interactive and short-form content, Instagram provides a more immersive experience for cultural learning through visual posts and stories. The findings emphasize the potential of social media platforms to act as supplementary tools for traditional education, offering accessible, engaging, and diverse learning opportunities. Future research should explore strategies for enhancing content quality on these platforms and assessing the long-term impact of informal learning through social media.

The study revealed that both TikTok and Instagram play significant roles in informal language and cultural learning. TikTok emerged as a more effective platform for language learning, particularly in acquiring informal language, slang, and everyday phrases. This platform's short-form, interactive nature helped engage users in real-time practice. Instagram, while also valuable for language learning, demonstrated a stronger emphasis on cultural learning, with its visually rich content offering immersive experiences of global cultures. The user demographics and content analysis revealed that younger age groups (18-30 years) were the most active in using these platforms for educational purposes. However, challenges such as misinformation and content accuracy were noted, particularly on TikTok.

The findings of this study align with prior research on the potential of social media platforms for informal learning, particularly in the areas of language acquisition and cultural exchange. Previous studies have highlighted platforms like YouTube and Facebook as key players in online education, yet the impact of short-form video platforms like TikTok has been less explored. This study's emphasis on TikTok's role in language learning contrasts with other research that has primarily focused on more traditional educational platforms. Instagram, however, mirrors the findings of research on visual learning, where visual content is shown to improve comprehension and cultural awareness. The results also build upon studies that emphasize user-generated content as a tool for authentic learning, highlighting the interactive aspect as a crucial factor in language retention.

The findings indicate that informal learning environments, particularly social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, are changing how language and culture are learned. These platforms enable users to learn in an informal, engaging, and self-paced environment, which contrasts with the traditional, structured nature of formal education (Alafnan, 2025; Jin, 2025). The strong user engagement with both language and cultural content suggests that social media can act as a valuable supplement to traditional educational methods. The study also signifies a shift towards more individualized, learner-driven content consumption, where learners have control over their educational experiences. This highlights the growing importance of digital literacy in modern education, as learners navigate and curate their learning paths through various social media platforms.

The implications of these findings are significant for educators and content creators. As TikTok and Instagram become increasingly popular as educational tools, there is a need for educational stakeholders to recognize the potential of these platforms in language acquisition and cultural learning. The study suggests that these platforms can be leveraged for educational purposes by integrating them into formal learning settings or using them to supplement traditional classroom instruction. Content creators also have an opportunity to design more effective educational videos and posts by focusing on accuracy and quality, addressing the challenge of misinformation (Nanne, 2025; Pérez & Ruiz-Cecilia, 2025). For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of promoting digital literacy programs that teach learners how to evaluate content critically and use social media platforms responsibly for learning.

The findings reflect the unique features of TikTok and Instagram that align with how users engage with learning. TikTok's short-form, highly interactive content resonates with the fast-paced, attention-grabbing nature of modern learners, especially in language learning, where repetitive exposure to vocabulary and phrases can facilitate quick retention. Instagram, with its visual storytelling and aesthetic appeal, is particularly suited for cultural learning, as it immerses users in diverse cultural expressions. The platform's focus on visuals rather than lengthy text allows for a more engaging and immediate learning experience. The demographic data also suggests that younger learners, who are more familiar with these platforms, are more likely to engage in informal learning through social media, reinforcing the platforms' role as significant educational tools for the digital-native generation.

Future research should focus on exploring strategies for improving the quality and accuracy of educational content on TikTok and Instagram, addressing the challenge of misinformation. Researchers should also examine the long-term effectiveness of learning through these platforms, specifically whether the skills gained through informal learning are retained and applied in more formal educational contexts (Hamati et al., 2025; Starke et al., 2025). Furthermore, educational institutions can explore ways to integrate social media into their curricula by providing structured guidance on how to use these platforms for educational purposes. Content creators should be encouraged to design more targeted and pedagogically sound educational content that aligns with the learning needs of users. In the meantime, educators and policymakers should develop frameworks that promote responsible social media usage, ensuring that these platforms are used as effective learning tools rather than sources of distraction.

## CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is the distinction between TikTok and Instagram in their roles in language and cultural learning. TikTok proved to be more effective for language acquisition, especially in learning informal language, slang, and conversational phrases. The platform's interactive, short-form video format, combined with its viral challenge-driven culture, helped facilitate language retention and engagement. On the other hand, Instagram was identified as a more effective platform for cultural learning, with its visual-centric content allowing users to immerse themselves in diverse cultural practices and global traditions. These findings highlight the unique strengths of each platform in fostering different aspects of informal learning.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on informal learning through social media by introducing a nuanced comparison between TikTok and Instagram. The methodological approach, which combines content analysis with semi-structured interviews, provides a comprehensive understanding of how users engage with these platforms for educational purposes. This mixed-methods design adds value by capturing both quantitative data on content types and

qualitative insights into user experiences, which enriches the current understanding of social media's role in informal education. By distinguishing the strengths of each platform, the research offers a conceptual framework that can guide future studies on digital learning environments.

Despite its valuable insights, the study has several limitations. The sample size of 30 participants, although sufficient for qualitative analysis, may not fully represent the broader population of social media users across different age groups and cultural contexts. Additionally, the study focused primarily on content from TikTok and Instagram, potentially excluding other influential platforms like YouTube or Facebook, which also contribute to informal learning. Future research could expand the sample size and include a wider range of social media platforms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their role in language and cultural education. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term effectiveness of learning via these platforms and assess whether the skills acquired are sustained and transferable to formal educational settings.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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