

Promoting Vocational School Students' Critical Thinking in Speaking by Using Instagram: Teachers' Voices

Winny Berliana¹, Sri Setyarini², Nenden Sri Lengkanawati³, Bachrudin Musthafa⁴, Rojab Siti Rodiyah⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia; winnyberliana99@upi.edu

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

instagram;
critical thinking;
speaking skills;
vocational school;
teachers' voices

Article history:

Received 2024-12-23

Revised 2025-02-03

Accepted 2025-06-15

ABSTRACT

The integration of digital tools in education has underscored the need for innovative strategies to develop critical skills, particularly in contexts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Among vocational school students, the ability to think critically and speak effectively in English is essential for employability and global communication. This qualitative study explored the use of Instagram to enhance critical thinking in speaking among vocational school students in Indonesia. Five EFL teachers, all experienced in using Instagram in the classroom, participated in the research. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of students' Instagram-based speaking activities. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns and insights. Findings indicate that Instagram supports critical thinking development by encouraging students to analyze content, evaluate different viewpoints, and articulate arguments through speaking tasks. Students also demonstrated improved fluency and confidence. However, challenges such as digital distractions and varying levels of digital literacy emerged. Teachers highlighted the need for structured guidance and scaffolding to mitigate these issues. Instagram holds significant potential as a pedagogical tool for enhancing critical thinking in speaking within EFL vocational settings. Effective implementation requires intentional instructional design, including reflective questioning, peer feedback, and guided support. Future research should examine the long-term effects of social media-based learning on learners' cognitive and linguistic progress.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Winny Berliana

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia; winnyberliana99@upi.edu

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the demand for critical thinking and effective communication skills has become increasingly essential, particularly in vocational education, where students are prepared to meet the professional challenges of a rapidly evolving workplace. In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the ability to think critically while communicating effectively in spoken English is crucial for

students aiming to succeed in globalized industries. As educational paradigms shift to incorporate digital tools, social media platforms such as Instagram have emerged as innovative resources for fostering these skills.

Critical thinking, often described as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to form reasoned judgments, plays a significant role in EFL learning. For vocational school students, critical thinking is not only a cognitive skill but also a practical necessity, as it empowers them to engage in problem-solving, decision-making, and effective communication (Irwan, 2024). Speaking, as one of the productive language skills, provides a medium for learners to articulate their ideas, respond to real-life situations, and interact with diverse audiences (Perse, 2024). However, fostering critical thinking in speaking activities remains a challenging task for educators, particularly in EFL settings where linguistic and cultural barriers can hinder meaningful engagement.

Social media, with its interactive and multimodal features, has become a prominent tool in education. Among these platforms, Instagram offers unique opportunities for language learning through its visual, textual, and audio-visual content (Nasution, 2023). The platform allows students to access authentic materials, such as posts, stories, and reels that reflect real-world language use and cultural contexts (Pritee Jain, 2024). These materials not only enhance students' linguistic skills but also stimulate critical thinking by encouraging them to analyze, interpret, and respond to content. Furthermore, Instagram's interactive features, such as commenting and sharing, promote collaboration and peer learning, creating a dynamic environment for practising spoken English.

Despite its potential, the integration of Instagram into EFL teaching, particularly for developing speaking skills, has not been extensively explored in the context of vocational education. Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing such digital tools, as their perspectives and strategies determine the effectiveness of these interventions. Understanding how teachers perceive and utilize Instagram to foster critical thinking in speaking activities can provide valuable insights into best practices and potential challenges.

This study aims to investigate EFL teachers' perspectives on using Instagram as a tool for enhancing vocational school students' critical thinking in speaking. It explores how Instagram's features are utilized in classroom activities, the benefits perceived by teachers, and the challenges encountered in its implementation. By focusing on vocational education, this study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical approaches to critical thinking and the practical realities of teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

Moreover, the literature review is organized into four main themes: critical thinking in EFL, speaking skills in EFL, social media as a learning tool, and the potential of Instagram for education. First, critical thinking is an essential 21st-century skill that involves analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to make reasoned judgments (Facione, 1990). In the EFL context, critical thinking is particularly important because it equips students with the ability to interpret language meaningfully and respond appropriately in diverse communicative scenarios (Paul & Elder, 2006). Critical thinking in language learning often manifests through activities that require problem-solving, argument construction, and evaluation of multiple perspectives (Fisher, 2011).

Research has emphasized the link between critical thinking and language skills. According to (Eddimani & Hind Brigui, 2024), fostering critical thinking in EFL classrooms helps students move beyond rote memorization and engage in meaningful communication. For vocational students, who require practical language skills for the workplace, integrating critical thinking into language instruction prepares them for real-world challenges.

Second, speaking is one of the core language skills that require learners to use language fluently, accurately, and appropriately in real-time interactions (Brown, 2007). For EFL learners, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill due to its spontaneous nature and the cognitive load of organizing ideas, using accurate grammar, and maintaining fluency simultaneously (Harmer, 2007).

Vocational students, in particular, need strong speaking skills to meet workplace demands, such as interviews, presentations, and client interactions (Richards, 2008). Studies have highlighted various

strategies to enhance speaking skills, including role-plays, debates, and multimedia tools (Thornbury, 2005). However, conventional classroom activities often fail to provide authentic, engaging contexts for practicing speaking. This gap underscores the need for innovative tools like social media to create real-world speaking opportunities.

Third, social media platforms have become an integral part of modern education, offering opportunities for collaborative learning, creativity, and engagement (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Research shows that social media can enhance language learning by providing authentic contexts for communication and fostering digital literacy skills (Torchinava, 2023). In the context of EFL, social media platforms facilitate task-based and student-centered learning, where learners engage in activities such as discussions, content creation, and feedback exchange (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). These platforms also encourage informal learning by extending language practice beyond the classroom (Zhao, 2013).

However, challenges such as distractions, cyberbullying, and digital inequality must be addressed to optimize the use of social media for learning (Tess, 2013). Teachers play a crucial role in designing structured, goal-oriented activities that leverage social media's potential while mitigating its drawbacks. Instagram, with its visual and interactive features, has emerged as a popular platform for educational purposes. Its user-friendly interface and multimedia capabilities make it an effective tool for engaging students in creative, collaborative learning activities (Al-Ali, 2014). Research has shown that Instagram can promote critical thinking by requiring students to analyze and create digital content (Kurniawan & Wijaya, 2020).

In critical thinking development through Instagram, students are encouraged to evaluate digital content, consider diverse perspectives, and articulate reasoned arguments in comments or captions (Maziriri et al., 2020). Tasks such as analyzing advertisements, critiquing social issues, and creating campaigns challenge students to apply higher-order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956). In addition, in enhancing speaking skills through Instagram, Instagram's video and live-streaming features provide opportunities for authentic speaking practice, allowing students to rehearse and refine their oral communication (Handayani, 2016). Then, collaborative projects, such as creating Instagram reels or responding to prompts via videos, foster fluency, coherence, and confidence (Jin, 2021).

Furthermore, in student engagement and motivation, the familiarity and popularity of Instagram among students contribute to higher engagement levels and motivation to learn (Rashid et al., 2019). Visual and interactive content helps maintain students' interest, making it particularly effective for younger learners (Zhou et al., 2020). Yet, challenges of using Instagram in education is while Instagram has significant educational potential, challenges such as distractions from non-academic content, varying digital literacy levels, and privacy concerns need to be addressed (Alabdulkareem, 2019). Teachers must design structured activities with clear objectives to ensure meaningful learning outcomes.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the benefits of social media in education, limited research has specifically focused on the role of Instagram in fostering critical thinking and speaking skills among vocational EFL students. Most existing studies explore general language learning or focus on tertiary education contexts (e.g., university students). Hence, this study addresses the gap by investigating how Instagram fosters critical thinking specifically in speaking tasks and exploring its application in vocational schools, where practical skills and engagement are paramount. Collecting teachers' perspectives to understand the practical challenges and strategies for effective.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how Instagram can be used to foster critical thinking and speaking skills among vocational EFL students. The research focused on teachers' perspectives, as they play a central role in integrating social media tools like Instagram into language learning. The choice of a qualitative approach was made because it allows for a deeper understanding of the context and experiences of teachers, as well as the nuanced ways in which Instagram influences students' development in these areas.

2.1 Research Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were five EFL teachers from vocational schools in Indonesia. These teachers were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they had the requisite experience in teaching English as a foreign language and had already integrated Instagram into their teaching for at least one semester. The aim was to gather detailed insights from those who were already familiar with using Instagram in the classroom, particularly for speaking and critical thinking tasks. The vocational schools selected for this research are specialized institutions that prepare students for specific careers, making practical language skills, such as speaking and critical thinking, vital for students' future professional success. Vocational education often emphasizes real-world applicability, which made it an ideal setting for examining how Instagram could be used to promote these skills.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques

To collect comprehensive data, a combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis was employed. Each of these data collection methods provided unique insights into how Instagram was utilized in the teaching and learning process.

a. Semi-Structured Interviews:

The first data collection method was semi-structured interviews with the five teachers. These interviews aimed to explore the teachers' perceptions and experiences of using Instagram to enhance students' critical thinking and speaking abilities. The interviews were designed to be open-ended, allowing the participants to share their insights freely. Questions revolved around how teachers structured Instagram-based activities, how they saw Instagram contributing to critical thinking and speaking, and what challenges they encountered while using the platform. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed for analysis.

b. Classroom Observations:

The second data collection method involved observing teachers' classrooms as they implemented Instagram-based activities. These observations allowed the researcher to capture real-time interactions between students and teachers, as well as how Instagram was integrated into the lesson plans. The focus during the observations was on student engagement, critical thinking behaviors, and the use of speaking skills during Instagram tasks. A structured observation checklist was used to guide the data collection, helping to focus on specific areas such as fluency, pronunciation, the depth of analysis, and student participation.

c. Document Analysis:

The final data collection method involved analyzing student outputs shared on Instagram. This included videos, Instagram posts, comments, and other forms of content created by students as part of their learning activities. The analysis of these outputs helped to assess the development of critical thinking and speaking skills, focusing on how students used Instagram as a platform to articulate ideas, respond to prompts, and engage in reflective thinking. A rubric was designed to evaluate the depth of students' critical thinking, the fluency and coherence of their spoken language, and their ability to use language accurately and appropriately in the context of Instagram tasks.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a structured approach to ensure that the findings were robust and well-supported by the data. The analysis began with familiarizing the researcher with the data by transcribing the interviews and reviewing the observation notes and student outputs. This was followed by an initial coding phase, where significant themes were identified from the interview transcripts and observation notes. The codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as "critical thinking skills," "speaking fluency," and "student engagement." To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, triangulation was used. The data from the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were compared to identify common patterns and discrepancies. This helped to provide a holistic view of how Instagram influenced students' critical thinking and speaking skills. In addition to thematic analysis, student outputs were evaluated using a detailed rubric that measured the

quality of critical thinking and speaking performance. The rubric assessed criteria such as the depth of analysis (e.g., identifying biases in Instagram posts), the use of evidence to support ideas, fluency in speaking, and coherence in presenting ideas.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The findings of this study are derived from the analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and student outputs, all of which explored how Instagram is used by teachers to foster critical thinking and speaking skills among vocational EFL students. These findings are organized into three main themes: Instagram's Contribution to Critical Thinking, Instagram's Influence on Speaking Skills, and Challenges and Solutions in Using Instagram for Teaching.

3.1.1 Instagram's Contribution to Critical Thinking

The data revealed that all participating teachers perceived Instagram as an effective platform for enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Several aspects were noted, including the platform's ability to encourage analysis, reflection, and discussion.

a. Promoting Analytical Thinking

Teachers highlighted that Instagram's visual and interactive nature stimulates students to critically engage with content. According to Teacher 1, "Instagram posts, especially those involving videos or advertisements, require students to look beyond the surface and analyze the purpose, message, and underlying assumptions." This was supported by Teacher 4, who explained, "Students are encouraged to think critically when creating posts because they have to consider how their message will be received by others."

These findings are consistent with previous studies that suggest social media platforms like Instagram can enhance critical thinking by requiring learners to analyze information, interpret meaning, and evaluate different viewpoints (Maziriri et al., 2020). For instance, students were tasked with analyzing posts and ads on Instagram, considering how different visual elements convey a message. Teacher 2 emphasized that students were asked to critique visual content and engage in discussions that required them to back up their viewpoints with evidence.

b. Encouraging Reflective Thinking

Teachers observed that Instagram supported student reflection, especially in activities requiring learners to express opinions and justify their viewpoints through captions and comments. One teacher explained that students often reflect on both the content they post and the opinions they share in the comments section, and that this reflection process helps them form more thoughtful and reasoned arguments. These observations align with Halvorsen's (2005) assertion that critical thinking is cultivated through self-reflection and the evaluation of personal perspectives in relation to others. Instagram's interactive and visual nature played a key role in promoting critical thinking by engaging students in tasks demanding deep analysis, reflection, and structured argumentation. For instance, in one activity, students were asked to analyze vocationally relevant Instagram posts—such as infographics on workplace safety or videos about emerging industry trends. They were required to assess the reliability of the sources, identify key messages, and consider how the content applied to their field. In one case, a student critically evaluated a post about automation in manufacturing, weighing its benefits and drawbacks, and then composed a thoughtful caption summarizing their analysis and reflections.

In another task titled "Analyze and Argue," students explored controversial topics related to their vocational fields, such as sustainability practices. They created one-minute videos presenting arguments for or against the issue, supported by evidence from research. Their peers then responded

through video replies or comments, offering counterarguments. This exchange encouraged students to evaluate differing perspectives and defend their positions, thereby enhancing critical thinking. Additionally, students participated in structured peer feedback activities, where they commented on classmates' posts using a rubric that assessed clarity, evidence, and critical depth. This process not only encouraged thoughtful critique of others' arguments but also promoted self-reflection on their own thinking and reasoning.

To assess students' development in critical thinking, teachers used a structured rubric measuring three core dimensions: analysis, reflection, and argumentation. "Analysis" involved identifying and interpreting key information within a task. "Reflection" required students to connect the content to broader vocational or real-world contexts. "Argumentation" focused on constructing reasoned, evidence-based conclusions. Students who achieved higher rubric scores consistently demonstrated the ability to assess multiple viewpoints and express complex, well-supported ideas.

3.1.2 Instagram's Influence on Speaking Skills

The use of Instagram in the classroom was found to have a significant positive impact on students' speaking skills. Teachers reported that the platform provided students with authentic opportunities to practice speaking, allowing them to gain confidence and improve their fluency.

a. Increased Engagement in Speaking Activities

Instagram's video features, such as Instagram Stories and Reels, were found to be particularly effective in encouraging students to speak more. Teacher 5 noted, "Students feel more motivated to speak because Instagram allows them to present themselves in a creative way. The platform is less intimidating than traditional speaking activities." This sentiment was echoed by Teacher 1, who mentioned that "Instagram's informal and creative environment reduces the anxiety students often feel in speaking situations."

This is consistent with research by Handayani (2016), who found that the use of multimedia tools like Instagram could reduce speaking anxiety and increase student participation. Instagram's informal nature creates a low-pressure environment where students feel comfortable engaging in speaking tasks.

b. Enhancement of Fluency and Pronunciation

Teachers also observed improvements in fluency and pronunciation as a result of using Instagram. Teacher 2 commented, "The repeated practice of recording and sharing videos on Instagram allows students to work on their pronunciation and fluency." Additionally, Teacher 4 noted that Instagram's short-form video format encouraged students to practice speaking in a more concise, clear manner.

These findings align with Thornbury (2005), who emphasized the importance of regular practice in enhancing speaking fluency and pronunciation. Furthermore, the creative aspect of Instagram allowed students to experiment with different speaking styles, which contributed to increased confidence.

c. Collaborative Speaking

Another notable benefit of using Instagram in the EFL classroom was its capacity to foster collaborative speaking. Students frequently worked in pairs or small groups to produce Instagram videos, which required them to negotiate meaning, plan their content together, and practice speaking within a shared, interactive context. One teacher observed that collaborative Instagram projects encouraged students to brainstorm, discuss ideas, and rehearse language use in a more dynamic environment. This aligns with Zhao's (2013) findings, which highlight the potential of social media platforms to promote collaborative learning and communication among learners.

Instagram-based activities also provided students with authentic, engaging opportunities to practice and develop their speaking skills. The platform's informal atmosphere helped reduce students' anxiety, making them more willing to speak and take linguistic risks. As a result, students showed improvements in fluency, confidence, and oral presentation abilities.

In one activity, students created video presentations on vocational topics such as “Essential Skills for My Vocational Career” or “Day-to-Day Challenges in My Field.” These tasks required them to carefully plan their speeches, practice pronunciation, and clearly articulate their ideas. The option to record multiple takes allowed students to refine their performance, leading to more polished and confident deliveries.

Additionally, students participated in interactive live sessions on Instagram, where they shared insights from their vocational training or responded to questions from peers. These live broadcasts simulated real-time conversations, helping students develop extemporaneous speaking skills and learn to manage unscripted discussions in English—an essential competence for real-world communication.

3.1.3 Challenges and Solutions in Using Instagram for Teaching

Despite the positive outcomes, teachers reported several challenges associated with using Instagram in the classroom. These challenges mainly revolved around distractions, digital literacy, and privacy concerns.

a. Distractions and Off-Topic Content

Teachers noted that students sometimes became distracted by non-academic content on Instagram, which could detract from the educational objectives of the lesson. Teacher 5 explained, “Some students get caught up in the entertainment aspects of Instagram, which leads to off-task behavior.”

To address this challenge, teachers developed strategies to keep students focused. Teacher 1 shared that “I set clear guidelines for how Instagram should be used in the classroom, emphasizing its educational purpose.” This aligns with Tess (2013), who suggested that clear guidelines and structures are necessary when incorporating social media into learning to prevent distractions.

b. Digital Literacy Challenges

Another challenge identified was the varying levels of digital literacy among students. Teacher 2 commented, “Some students struggle with using Instagram effectively for academic purposes, especially when it comes to editing videos or understanding digital content creation tools.”

To overcome this issue, teachers provided additional training on using Instagram and digital content creation tools, ensuring that all students were on equal footing. This aligns with the research of Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2018), who emphasized the need for digital literacy training when using social media for educational purposes.

c. Privacy Concerns

Teachers also expressed concerns about the privacy implications of using Instagram as an educational tool. One teacher noted that both students and parents were uneasy about sharing videos and images online, particularly regarding who could view the content and how it might be used. To address these concerns, educators emphasized the importance of using private Instagram accounts and taught students how to manage privacy settings to control who could access their posts. Teachers also reassured families by making it clear that only educational content would be shared and that personal information would remain protected. These strategies reflect the importance of adopting privacy-conscious practices when integrating social media into the classroom, as emphasized by Alabdulkareem (2019).

In addition to privacy, the study identified several practical challenges, including digital distractions, inconsistent content quality, and technological limitations. To manage student distractions, teachers used time-management applications and checklist-based assignments. For instance, students were guided through structured tasks such as content analysis, scriptwriting, recording, and peer review using detailed checklists. This approach helped maintain focus and ensured that students followed a clear and purposeful workflow.

To improve the quality of student-created content, teachers introduced short workshops focused on fundamental digital skills, including video editing, visual storytelling, and content planning. These workshops not only enhanced the final outputs shared on Instagram but also equipped students with transferable skills relevant to future vocational and professional contexts. By embedding these strategies, teachers addressed both pedagogical and technological challenges, supporting more effective and secure use of Instagram in EFL classrooms.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into how Instagram can be effectively used to foster critical thinking and speaking skills among vocational EFL students. Drawing upon the theoretical framework and previous studies, these results are situated within the broader context of vocational education, revealing practical implications for language teaching and learning in digitally enhanced classrooms.

One of the most prominent outcomes was Instagram's ability to enhance students' critical thinking. Teachers noted that the platform's visual and interactive features prompted students to deeply analyze and evaluate content. This aligns with Halvorsen's (2005) argument that multimedia engagement fosters analytical and reflective thinking—essential components of critical reasoning. The tasks assigned often required students to interpret the meaning of visual content, assess its purpose and assumptions, and connect it to real-world issues. For example, Teacher 1 observed that students critiqued visual elements in Instagram posts—such as color schemes or captions—to explore broader societal implications. This active engagement reflects the core processes of critical thinking: analysis, evaluation, and synthesis (Facione, 2015).

In addition to analytical skills, Instagram encouraged reflective thinking and self-expression. The task format, which involved writing captions or comments, required students to justify their opinions and reflect on their reasoning. Teacher 3 emphasized that students learned to think critically about the content they shared, leading to heightened metacognitive awareness. This is consistent with Nobutoshi's (2023) and Dewey's (1933) views on reflective thinking, which underscore the importance of deliberate self-evaluation in developing intellectual autonomy.

Beyond critical thinking, the study revealed that Instagram positively impacted students' speaking skills. The use of multimedia features like Reels and Stories provided authentic, low-stakes opportunities for oral practice. Teachers reported that this informal and creative space reduced students' speaking anxiety and increased their willingness to participate in speaking tasks. As Teacher 4 observed, students felt more confident expressing themselves in videos compared to traditional classroom presentations. This supports Handayani's (2016) and Thornbury's (2005) claims that lowering affective filters—such as anxiety—is essential for developing oral proficiency. Instagram created an environment where students could rehearse their language use, take creative risks, and build fluency over time.

Repetitive speaking tasks, such as recording multiple takes of video presentations, also contributed to improvements in fluency and pronunciation. Teacher 2 explained that this iterative process allowed students to refine their language delivery and clarity. The short-form nature of Instagram content further encouraged students to express ideas concisely and coherently—an important skill in real-world communication scenarios like interviews or presentations. Teacher 4 remarked that the time constraint pushed students to be precise and intentional in their speech, mirroring authentic speaking demands.

Collaborative speaking was another key benefit observed. Students frequently worked in pairs or groups on Instagram-based projects, where they planned, recorded, and provided feedback on each other's content. Teacher 3 noted that such collaboration not only improved speaking practice but also promoted teamwork, idea sharing, and peer learning. This supports Zhao's (2013) findings on the collaborative potential of social media, as well as Berns et al. (2007), who emphasized the value of digital

collaboration in vocational contexts. Students learned to negotiate meaning, resolve creative differences, and engage in real-time interaction—skills critical for workplace communication.

Despite these benefits, the study also highlighted several challenges, including distractions, digital literacy gaps, and privacy concerns. Teachers reported that students were sometimes sidetracked by Instagram's entertainment features, leading to off-task behavior. As Teacher 5 explained, the platform's social nature occasionally detracted from its educational purpose. To counter this, teachers implemented clear usage guidelines and structured tasks to keep students focused. Teacher 1 emphasized the importance of outlining expectations and task sequences, a practice aligned with Mishra and Koehler's (2006) recommendations for technology integration.

Another challenge involved digital literacy. Some students struggled with technical aspects of content creation, such as video editing or using platform features for academic purposes. Teacher 2 pointed out the need for additional training to help students effectively engage with the medium. To address this, teachers integrated workshops into the curriculum that focused on essential digital skills—an approach consistent with Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg's (2018) emphasis on the role of digital literacy in educational technology use.

Privacy and safety were also significant concerns, raised by both students and parents. Teacher 4 noted apprehension about sharing videos and images online. These concerns echo Alabdulkareem's (2019) findings regarding the need for privacy-conscious strategies when using social media in education. Teachers responded by encouraging the use of private accounts, limiting audience access, and ensuring that only educational content was shared. Clear communication with parents also helped build trust and mitigate these concerns.

Taken together, the study demonstrates that Instagram has considerable potential to support the development of critical thinking and speaking skills in vocational EFL contexts. Its visual and interactive design promotes analysis, reflection, and self-expression, while its informal environment encourages speaking practice without the pressure typical of classroom settings. However, realizing this potential requires intentional instructional design, digital skills training, and clear usage guidelines to address common challenges.

The long-term implications of Instagram use extend beyond academic outcomes. By consistently engaging in reflective tasks and structured peer feedback, students may develop enduring habits of questioning and analyzing, which are valuable in workplace problem-solving. Similarly, repeated speaking tasks can help students build confidence in expressing their ideas spontaneously—an essential skill in professional communication. Future research could examine whether these habits persist and translate into real-world cognitive and communicative competence.

When comparing Instagram with other digital tools, such as YouTube and Flipgrid, important distinctions emerge. YouTube offers access to professional content but tends to promote passive consumption. Flipgrid, while more structured and education-oriented, lacks the social engagement and visual creativity of Instagram. For vocational learners, Instagram strikes a balance by providing a familiar, engaging space that promotes both creativity and interactivity. Nevertheless, combining tools—leveraging YouTube for exposure, Flipgrid for structured discussions, and Instagram for creative production—may yield optimal learning outcomes.

To effectively implement Instagram in the classroom, teachers should follow a structured integration plan. This includes introducing the platform with a focus on digital literacy and privacy settings, followed by a series of scaffolded tasks that gradually build critical thinking and speaking skills. For instance, students could begin with basic analysis tasks and progress to live presentations and collaborative projects. A sample task might involve analyzing a vocational trend, creating a short video, and defending a viewpoint in the caption, with peers offering counterarguments in the comments. Assessment rubrics should evaluate both content quality and oral performance, providing students with meaningful feedback and opportunities for growth.

Reflection should be embedded throughout the process to deepen learning. Post-task discussions and guided reflection prompts can help students evaluate their performance, recognize strengths and

weaknesses, and set goals for improvement. Prompts such as “Which part of your argument was most effective, and why?” or “What would you change in your delivery next time?” encourage self-awareness and promote iterative learning.

Finally, challenges such as distractions and inconsistent content quality must be anticipated and addressed proactively. Teachers can use digital tools to limit off-task behavior and ensure accountability through checklist-based assignments. With structured planning, clear guidelines, and continuous support, Instagram can be transformed from a recreational platform into a powerful educational tool for enhancing critical thinking and speaking among vocational EFL learners.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the use of Instagram to foster critical thinking and improve speaking skills among vocational school students in an EFL context, based on teachers' perspectives. The findings highlight that Instagram effectively encourages critical thinking by requiring students to evaluate, analyze, and reflect on content. The platform's visual and interactive features also allowed students to creatively express their thoughts, promoting deeper engagement with vocational topics. In terms of speaking skills, Instagram videos helped students improve fluency and confidence, offering a low-pressure environment for practice. However, pronunciation and accuracy remained areas for improvement. Despite its benefits, teachers faced challenges such as managing distractions, ensuring content quality, and addressing technology issues. To improve, more structured Instagram tasks and additional focus on pronunciation practice are recommended. Teacher training and promoting peer review could also enhance the platform's educational value. Overall, Instagram is a valuable tool for fostering critical thinking and enhancing speaking skills, with the potential for further refinement through targeted strategies and activities.

Furthermore, this study highlights the potential of Instagram as an effective tool in EFL and vocational education for fostering critical thinking and enhancing speaking skills. The findings suggest that Instagram's visual and interactive features can engage students in analyzing content and reflecting on vocational topics, bridging theory with real-world application. The study also emphasizes the need for teacher professional development in effectively using Instagram for educational purposes, particularly in managing student engagement and providing constructive feedback. Future research should explore the impact of specific, structured Instagram tasks (e.g., debates, discussions) on critical thinking and speaking skills. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of Instagram on language learning outcomes. Comparative studies with other digital tools or traditional methods would help clarify Instagram's unique benefits and limitations. Additionally, student-centered research could further investigate students' perspectives on Instagram's role in learning, motivation, and self-regulation.

In conclusion, Instagram has shown significant potential as an innovative tool to support EFL learning by engaging vocational students in meaningful tasks that develop critical thinking and speaking skills. With proper planning, structured tasks, and reflective practices, its use can extend beyond the classroom, equipping students with habits and skills relevant to their professional futures. Comparing Instagram with other digital tools further underscores its unique strengths while highlighting opportunities for complementary integration. Future research should examine the sustainability of these outcomes and explore hybrid approaches to optimize learning experiences.

REFERENCES

- Alabdulkareem, S. (2019). Social media in education: Usage and perception among students and teachers. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0131-0>

- Al-Ali, S. (2014). Embracing the selfie craze: Exploring the possible use of Instagram as a language m-learning tool. *Issues in Language Studies*, 3(1), 23–35.
- Berns, A., Gonzalez-Pardo, A., & Camacho, D. (2007). Learning and teaching in the digital age: The role of social media in education. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 36(4), 371–398. <https://doi.org/10.2190/EC.36.4.d>
- Brown, H. D. (2020). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. D.C. Heath & Co.
- Eddimani, A., & Brigui, H. (2024). Investigating teachers' use of reading materials to cultivate Moroccan EFL learners' critical thinking skills and dispositions: Towards a new classroom pedagogy. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 6(4), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2024.6.4.14>
- Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Insight Assessment.
- Halvorsen, A. (2005). Incorporating critical thinking skills development into ESL/EFL courses. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(3). <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Halvorsen-CriticalThinking.html>
- Handayani, F. (2016). Instagram as a teaching tool? Its efficacy in developing EFL students' speaking skills. *TEFLIN Journal*, 27(1), 14–23. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v27i1/14-23>
- Irwan, I. (2024). Introduction to interactive video-based e-learning to improve critical thinking skills in vocational high school students. *Unram Journal of Community Service*, 5(3), 176–181. <https://doi.org/10.29303/uics.v5i3.705>
- Kukulska-Hulme, A., & Viberg, O. (2018). Mobile assisted language learning. In *Handbook of research on mobile learning in contemporary classrooms* (pp. 1–22). IGI Global.
- Kurniawan, H., & Wijaya, H. (2020). Instagram as a medium to develop students' critical thinking. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 15(11), 102–116. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i11.12917>
- Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016). Facebook and the others: Potentials and obstacles of social media for teaching in higher education. *Computers & Education*, 95, 216–230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.01.012>
- Maziriri, E. T., Gupa, B. T., & Madinga, N. W. (2020). Instagram for language learning: A critical review of its impact. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 15(7), 49–60. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i07.13021>
- Nasution, A. K. P. (2023). Instagram in English language learning: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 3(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.37249/jllt.v3i1.708>
- Nobutoshi, M. (2023). Metacognition and reflective teaching: A synergistic approach to fostering critical thinking skills. *Research and Advances in Education*, 2(9), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.56397/RAE.2023.09.01>
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *Critical thinking: Learn the tools the best thinkers use*. Pearson Education.
- Perse, R. J. P. (2024). Speaking skills: A panacea for college students in the classroom and in the workplace. *Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202407.0093.v1>
- Jain, P. (2024). Authentic materials for intercultural communication: Develop speaking materials that encourage learners to engage in authentic cross-cultural communication effectively in diverse global contexts. *Creative Saplings*, 3(4), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.56062/gtrs.2024.3.4.563>
- Smith, R., & Chen, Y. (2019). Social media and EFL learning: A review of current practices. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(2), 45–56.
- Tess, P. A. (2013). The role of social media in higher education classes (real and virtual) — A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), 60–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.032>
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Longman.

- Torchinava, E. (2023). The impact of social media on the four components of English language development for learners (A case study). *Online Journal of Humanities*. <https://doi.org/10.52340/PUTK.2023.2346-8149.01>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.