



Language Styles and Learning Motivation Changes in Instagram Captions: A Case of Three International Students

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Abstract

This study analyzes the changes in language style and English learning motivation reflected in 181 Instagram captions from three international students pursuing higher education in Indonesia. The analysis is based on Martin Joos's theory of language styles and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. This qualitative descriptive research focuses on comparing captions from the period before and during their study in Indonesia. The findings indicate a significant shift. Prior to their studies, the dominant language style was casual (41.41%), and motivation was rarely expressed (2.02%), categorized primarily as L2 Learning Experience. However, during their time abroad, language styles became more varied. While the casual style remained dominant (39.23%), the use of the consultative style also increased (23.20%), suggesting an adaptation to audience and communicative goals. Motivational expressions also increased significantly, especially L2 Learning Experience (19.34%), followed by Ideal L2 Self (6.08%) and Ought-to L2 Self (2.21%). These changes highlight the strong influence of social, academic, and personal development on language use and motivational expression on social media. The findings support Dörnyei's assertion that language motivation is not static but evolves in response to a learner's experiences. This research contributes to the literature on digital discourse and language learning motivation in the context of English education.

Keywords: Instagram Captions; Language Style; Learning Motivation; L2 Motivational Self System; International Students

Introduction

The trend of international student mobility has grown significantly, with over 6.4 million international students worldwide in 2023, marking a 32% increase in

the last five years (Campus France, 2023). The Asia-Pacific region, particularly countries like China, India, and Vietnam, contributes to international students, while European and North American countries remain popular destinations for studying abroad. UNESCO data (2024) recorded that 59,224 Indonesian students were studying abroad, while nearly 2,997 international students held study permits in Indonesia (merdekabelajar.kemdikbud.go.id, 2024). Indonesia was to enter the international knowledge economy, and it tried to provide the human resources by adjusting the education system (Fitriati & Rata, 2020). Thus, Indonesia also has a growing awareness of the importance of global experiences, with more than 60,000 international students involved in educational mobility.

International students are those who pursue higher education in a foreign country while remaining connected to their home country. International students are defined as a subgroup of foreign students who move from their home country with the primary purpose of pursuing education (OECD, 2015). Meanwhile, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2016) uses the term internationally mobile students to refer to those who physically cross-national borders for educational purposes. They often find themselves facing the academic and social challenges of two different cultures, balancing their studies abroad with emotional ties to their home country (Munter et al., 2018). For this study, international students are specifically defined as three foreign students currently pursuing higher education in Semarang. Two students are from Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), and one is from Universitas Dian Nuswantoro (Udinus).

During this process, they use social media as a communication tool, sharing experiences and expressing their identities and feelings. As one of the leading social media platforms, Instagram serves as an outlet for documenting their journeys. Not only posting visual media, students also write descriptions or stories through Instagram captions, which sometimes unintentionally reflect changes in their language style and learning motivation. This study explores changes in language style and learning motivation reflected in Instagram captions of international students, before and during their studies in both their home country and host country.

Research on language use in social media has grown significantly, particularly in understanding how language is used to express identity and social experiences in the digital world. Studies show that these platforms allow individuals to adapt to social norms, share personal stories, and shape their identities through language (Çömlekçi, 2020; Zulfikar & Digdowiseiso, 2023). For international students, social media has proven to be an effective tool for reducing feelings of isolation and building new social networks (Leong, 2015; Lin et al., 2012). Furthermore, these platforms serve as spaces for language learning, cultural exploration, and personal growth, helping students engage with their new environment while staying connected to their home culture.

While there has been considerable research on language use in social media and learning motivation among international students, a critical gap exists in

understanding how international students reflect changes in language style and learning motivation through Instagram captions. Existing studies have primarily focused on language use in formal academic settings or general social media engagement, with less attention paid to how students from multiple cultural backgrounds adapt their language styles in personal, informal contexts like Instagram. Additionally, previous research has not sufficiently explored how these changes in language style correlate with shifts in learning motivation during the students' cross-cultural educational experiences. There is a need for more focused research that examines how international students use social media to express these changes and how these expressions are linked to their learning motivation.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based solely on Instagram captions and interviews related to learning motivation in general. The interviews were not specifically conducted to examine and confirm learning motivation directly and in depth based on the captions analyzed. As a result, the interpretation of the relationship between captions and learning motivation remains general and may not fully capture the more detailed personal and contextual dynamics. Second, this study is limited in scope as it does not examine other possible factors that may influence the variations in language style and learning motivation reflected in Instagram captions. External variables such as cultural background, prior language exposure, psychological factors, or institutional contexts are beyond the focus of this research and therefore not analyzed in detail.

Method

This section outlines the study's research design, sample population, data collection techniques, instrument development, and data analysis methods. Each of these elements will be discussed in detail to provide a clear understanding of how the study was structured and implemented. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how language styles and learning motivation change in Instagram captions among international students. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how students' language use and motivations are reflected in their Instagram posts before and during their studies abroad.

A qualitative approach is appropriate because it provides a deep understanding of individual meanings and behaviors, particularly concerning language style and identity construction in the digital realm (Creswell, 2012). The study also uses a discourse analysis design as explained by Gee (2011). Gee (2011) further expands this understanding by distinguishing between discourse (with a small "d"), which refers to the everyday use of language in interaction, and Discourse (with a capital "D"), which encompasses language practices that include identities, values, ideologies, and social practices. According to him, language use is not only about delivering messages but also about constructing meaning, identity,

social relationships, activities, and connections across experiences (Gee, 2011).

Sample Population

The sample population consists of international students studying in Indonesia who are originally from non-native English-speaking countries. These students were selected based on the following criteria:

1. They have been studying in Indonesia for at least one year.
2. They have been actively using Instagram for at least six months in their home and host countries (Indonesia).
3. Their Instagram posts include captions written in English, which reflect their academic experiences, identity construction, and language style.
4. They actively share content about their study abroad experience, including personal reflections, academic goals, and cultural adaptations.

To protect their privacy, each participant is identified by a code:

IS1: A 27-year-old female student from Papua New Guinea who has been studying Information Technology at Udinus since September 2023.

IS2: A male student from Pakistan who has been studying English Education at UNNES since September 2023.

IS3: A male student from Timor Leste who has been studying Environmental Science at UNNES since August 2022.

Three Instagram accounts of international students were selected for analysis: @IS1, @IS2, and @IS3 (The Instagram account names are anonymized). These accounts were chosen based on their active engagement and the availability of posts before and during their study period in Indonesia, which meets the criteria for in-depth analysis.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

The steps of data collection were as follows:

1. **Selecting Instagram Accounts:** The researcher identified Instagram accounts of international students who actively posted content preceding and encompassing their study abroad. These accounts were selected purposively to ensure they met the research criteria.
2. **Capturing Digital Traces:** Relevant Instagram posts were documented by taking screenshots of the captions and associated images or hashtags. This process allowed for the collection of data that reflects both the verbal and visual elements of students' posts.
3. **Categorizing Data:** The collected data was organized into two categories:
 - a. **Before Study Abroad:** Captions reflecting students' experiences and language use prior to their study abroad.
 - b. **During Study Abroad:** Captions that show changes or developments in students' language style and motivations while studying in Indonesia.

Instruments

The primary instruments used in data collection, which have been validated by experts include:

1. A Style Analysis Sheet, based on Martin Joos's (1967) theory of language styles, to classify captions into five categories: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate.
2. An L2 Motivation Analysis Sheet, adapted from Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self-System theory, to identify the motivational components reflected in the captions, including Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, which involves examining textual and visual content to identify patterns and themes. The data analysis process followed two main stages: language style analysis and motivation analysis.

1. Language Style Analysis: The captions were analyzed using Martin Joos's (1967) theory of language styles, which categorizes language into five styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Each Instagram caption was examined and classified according to the level of formality, word choice, and sentence structure. This analysis allowed the researcher to identify shifts in language style before and during the study abroad period, which may reflect students' cultural adaptation and academic experiences.
2. L2 Motivation Analysis: To analyze the learning motivation of international students, the captions were assessed using Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS). This framework focuses on three motivational components:
 - a. Ideal L2 Self: The personal desire to become a successful English learner.
 - b. Ought-to L2 Self: External pressures or expectations related to language learning, such as family or societal expectations.
 - c. L2 Learning Experience: The impact of previous language learning experiences on current motivation.

The captions were coded for expressions that reflected these motivational components. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, inter-coder reliability for the coding of both language styles and motivation was also established using expert judgment from an English lecturer specializing in discourse analysis. In addition, data from the semi-structured interviews were used to validate and supplement the findings from the caption analysis.

Contextual Interpretation: To ensure a comprehensive understanding, not only the captions but also the analysis involved interpreting the pictures briefly to take

a look at the context of the captions. This helped identify any changes in language style or motivation over time and provided insights into how students adapted to their host country.

Finally, the researcher compiled the results, identifying dominant patterns in language style and motivational shifts, and synthesized these findings to draw conclusions about how language use and motivation evolve in response to cultural and educational transitions.

Results

In this section, the researcher answered the research questions that have been proposed.

Language Styles in the Instagram Captions of International Students Before Their Study Abroad Period

This section presents the findings on the language styles used by international students prior to their study abroad period. Each finding is detailed through both tables and explanatory paragraphs, as shown below.

Table 1. International Students' Language Styles Before Study

Styles	IS1	IS1 %	IS2	IS2 %	IS3	IS3 %
	Freq		Freq		Freq	
No Caption	0	0.0	27	49.09	0	0.0
Other Language	0	0.0	15	27.27	2	5.13
Only Emoji	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	10.26
Frozen	0	0.0	2	3.64	0	0.0
Formal	0	0.0	2	3.64	0	0.0
Consultative	1	20.0	3	5.45	1	2.56
Casual	4	80.0	6	10.91	31	79.49
Intimate	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.56
Total	5	100.0	55	100.0	39	100.0

International Student 1 (IS1) posted a total of five captions before studying abroad. Four of these (80%) were written in the casual style, while one (20%) was consultative. The casual style appeared when everyday experiences were expressed in a light and playful manner through short, informal sentences, often accompanied by emojis. For example, the caption *"Cheers to a fun filled Christmas weekend 🥳 Winding down on a good note 😊"* (December 27, 2021) illustrates a cheerful and relaxed tone without any academic intention. In contrast, the consultative style was used when the student adopted a more organized and polite structure, as seen in *"Manila International Airport ✈️ The airport that never sleeps ❤️"* (September 5, 2023). This caption is descriptive and informative but still

maintains an approachable tone, reflecting early signs of English use for social and informational purposes.

International Student 2 (IS2) produced more captions than IS1 and IS3, showing a preference for visual communication or other languages. During this period, nearly half of the posts contained no captions (49.09%), while 27.27% were written in Urdu. Casual style appeared in 10.91% of captions, while consultative (5.45%), frozen (3.64%), and formal (3.64%) styles were used sparingly. A casual example is “#Papita form house 🏠” (August 15, 2020), which is short, playful, and accompanied by an emoji. Consultative style was found in captions like “A snapshot during IELTS class @IBA Sukkur” (January 1, 2023), which clearly situates the student in an academic environment. A frozen style example, “Indonesian Consulate General Karachi” (August 14, 2023), reflects institutional formality with a fixed expression, while a formal style post such as “Never compare yourself with others because they don’t know your bad time and you don’t know about theirs.” (August 27, 2020) represents structured, impersonal advice intended for a general audience.

International Student 3 (IS3) showed the highest engagement in English use, posting 39 captions before study. Most captions (79.49%) were casual, followed by consultative (2.56%), intimate (2.56%), emoji-only (10.26%), and other languages (5.13%). Casual style dominated, often capturing social activities or personal reflections. For example, “Lighting Night 🎆 In @TimorPlaza #LightingNight #Light #TimorPlaza #dili #Timorese” (February 12, 2018) conveys an enjoyable event through hashtags and emojis in an informal tone. A consultative caption, “Make Little Thing For Our Mother Earth Safety. 🌍🌱” (March 4, 2021), reflects structured and polite encouragement for environmental awareness. Meanwhile, intimate style is shown in “Home is where our story begins...” 🏠💕🌱 (January 23, 2020), which conveys personal emotion and attachment, directed at a closer audience.

Language Styles Used by International Students in Instagram Captions During Studying Abroad

This section presents the findings on the language styles used by international students during their study abroad period. Each finding is detailed through both tables and explanatory paragraphs, as shown below.

Table 2. International Students’ Language Styles During Study

Styles	IS1	IS1 %	IS2	IS2 %	IS3	IS3 %
	Freq		Freq		Freq	

No Caption	0	0.0	30	44.12	0	0.0
Other Language	1	1.96	0	0.0	4	6.45
Only Emoji	0	0.0	1	1.47	8	12.90
Frozen	0	0.0	9	13.24	0	0.0
Formal	0	0.0	1	1.47	8	12.90
Consultative	9	17.65	11	16.18	22	35.48
Casual	35	68.63	16	23.53	20	32.26
Intimate	6	11.76	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	51	100.0	68	100.0	62	100.0

During the study period, International Student 1 (IS1) wrote 51 captions, most of which were casual (68.63%), followed by consultative (17.65%), intimate (11.76%), and one in another language (1.96%). Casual captions dominated, usually expressing everyday life in a light and personal tone, often with emojis and hashtags, such as *"After a productive day of cleaning, I decided to take myself out for a treat and fresh air 🌸 #pngvibesPG #semarangexplore #selfcare"* (November 17, 2023). Consultative captions appeared in more structured reflections, particularly about adaptation experiences abroad, for example *"The first month I was sad, lonely and homesick... my Indonesian family succeeded in encouraging me to be strong..."* (November 24, 2023). Intimate style was used to share emotional closeness with family or friends, as in *"May this remind me of how I was stressed with my work and life's challenges and my lovely friends had to call me..."* (December 10, 2024). The single Tok Pisin caption reflected ties with the home audience. Overall, IS1's captions highlight personal adjustment, balancing academic responsibilities with social and emotional well-being.

International Student 2 (IS2) produced 68 captions, with nearly half containing no text (44.12%). Among the rest, casual style (23.53%) was most common, while consultative (16.18%), frozen (13.24%), formal (1.47%), and one emoji-only caption were less frequent. Casual posts were light and friendly, such as *"Welcome day degree and Non degree programs. Thank you, guys 😊"* (September 29, 2023). Consultative captions appeared in academic contexts, for instance *"Conference at Faculty of Education and Psychology, as an International student I enjoyed more 🥰"* (October 10, 2023). Frozen style was typically limited to institutional names, while the sole formal caption reflected professionalism in teaching, e.g., *"Teaching at SMIT Bina Amal School in Semarang... has been an internationally enriching experience."* (March 3, 2024). The high proportion of no-caption posts indicates lower engagement with English-based written expression, although some captions signaled increasing involvement in academic and professional contexts.

International Student 3 (IS3) posted 62 captions, with consultative style as the

most dominant (35.48%), followed by casual (32.26%), formal (12.90%), other languages (6.45%), and emoji-only posts (12.90%). Consultative captions often documented academic or environmental initiatives, such as “*Mangroves are one of nature’s most effective tools in the fight against climate change.*” (December 4, 2022). Casual posts reflected everyday life and emotions, for example “*this is why I want to come back home 🇮🇩🇵🇮🇹*” (January 28, 2024). Formal style appeared in professional contexts, particularly when announcing achievements, such as “*I am thrilled to announce that I have been selected as a Delegate for the One Young World ASEAN Leadership Forum 2024...*” (June 11, 2024). Captions in Indonesian and Hawaiian, as well as emoji-only posts, added variety but limited linguistic analysis. Overall, IS3 showed consistent use of English for academic, professional, and social purposes, with a stronger orientation toward structured and formalized expression compared to IS1 and IS2.

Learning Motivation in the Instagram Captions of International Students Before Their Study Abroad Period

This section presents the findings on the learning motivation reflected by international students before their study abroad period. Each finding is detailed through both tables and explanatory paragraphs, as shown below.

Table 3. International Students’ Learning Motivation Before Study

Style	IS1	IS1 %	IS2	IS2 %	IS3	IS3 %
	Freq		Freq		Freq	
No Caption	0	0.0	27	49.0	0	0.0
Other Language	0	0.0	15	27.0	2	5.0
Not Relevant	4	80.0	12	22.0	37	95.0
Ideal L2 Self	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Ought-to L2 Self	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Learning Experience	1	20.0	1	2.0	0	0.0
Total	5	100.0	55	100.0	39	100.0

In the before-study phase, International Student 1 (IS1) posted five captions, with four (80%) not related to English learning motivation and one (20%) categorized as *Learning Experience*. The caption “*Jakarta Airport, the paperless airport ✈️ PNG really need to upgrade 🇵🇮 ... Customs declaration, etc 🤔*” (8 September 2023) illustrates her exposure to institutional literacy practices in English. Though light and humorous, it reflects early cross-cultural adjustment. Reinforced by her statement “*I speak English daily, I write and read in English. English is a global language to which I get to interact with other international*

students,” IS1’s motivation was grounded in direct learning experiences rather than in *Ideal L2 Self* or *Ought-to L2 Self*.

International Student 2 (IS2) uploaded 55 captions, most of which had no text (49%) or were written in other languages (27%). Only one caption (2%) reflected motivation under the *Learning Experience* category: “A snapshot during EILTS class@IBA Sukkur” (1 January 2023). This post signals engagement with structured language learning in preparation for academic mobility. In the interview, IS2 confirmed this by explaining his background with tutors and teachers: “I used to go to private tutor... I also practice English with my local friends.” Like IS1, IS2’s motivation was rooted in learning experience, not in *Ideal L2 Self* or *Ought-to L2 Self*.

International Student 3 (IS3) wrote 39 captions, almost all of which were not relevant (95%) or in other languages (5%). “Not relevant” means that the caption is written in English, but it cannot be categorized as learning motivation because it does not express any indication of learning motivation within the caption itself. None showed explicit English learning motivation. However, in the interview, IS3 emphasized past experiences: “I only took English courses maybe for about six months or a year during junior high, then stopped in high school, and only started again after high school.” This indicates motivation based on accumulated *Learning Experiences* rather than future-oriented or obligation-driven goals.

Overall, before studying abroad, IS1 and IS2 showed minimal but clear motivation through captions reflecting *Learning Experience*, while IS3’s evidence came only from interviews. No student displayed signs of *Ideal L2 Self* or *Ought-to L2 Self* in this phase.

Learning Motivation in the Instagram Captions of International Students During Their Study Abroad Period

Table 4. international Students’ Learning Motivation During Study

Style	IS1	IS1	IS2	IS2	IS3	IS3
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
No Caption	0	0.00	30	44.12	0	0.00
Other Language	1	1.96	0	0.00	4	6.45
Not Relevant	34	66.67	31	45.59	31	50.00
Ideal L2 Self	3	5.88	1	1.47	7	11.29
Ought-to L2 Self	4	7.84	0	0.00	0	0.00
Learning Experience	9	17.65	6	8.82	20	32.26
Total	51	100.0	68	100.0	62	100.0

During the study period, IS1 uploaded 51 captions, mostly not relevant (67%) which means that the caption is written in English, but it cannot be categorized as learning motivation because it does not express any indication of learning

motivation within the caption itself, but with notable increases in motivational expressions: *Learning Experience* (18%), *Ought-to L2 Self* (8%), and *Ideal L2 Self* (6%). For example, the caption “*It was a privilege to invigilate and assess these young minds for their English pronunciation class...*” (19 December 2024 – Semarang) shows motivation through learning experience, while “*Everyone is expecting me to fight for something I did not break...*” (31 December 2024 – Jakarta) reflects external expectations consistent with *Ought-to L2 Self*. Another post, “*I keep reminding myself... it is hard, taking the step forward to live and study on your own in another country*” (12 September 2023 – Semarang), demonstrates *Ideal L2 Self*, where the student envisions adapting as an international learner.

IS2 posted 68 captions, with 44% having no text and 46% not relevant. Only a small portion reflected motivation: *Learning Experience* (9%) and *Ideal L2 Self* (1%). One example is “*Teaching at SMIT Bina Amal School in Semarang has been an internationally enriching experience...*” (3 March 2024 – Semarang), which illustrates motivation through learning experience, while “*(being a good teacher) English with Ihsan & @vidyackr*” (22 November 2024 – FIK UNNES) shows *Ideal L2 Self*, representing aspiration toward becoming an English teacher.

IS3 uploaded 62 captions, half not relevant (50%), but a significant share revealed motivation: *Learning Experience* (32%) and *Ideal L2 Self* (11%). For instance, “*I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the One Earth NextGen Leaders Program 2025 in Hong Kong...*” (14 April 2025 – Hong Kong) highlights transformative learning experiences, while “*I am truly honored and grateful to be selected to represent Timor-Leste at the One Earth Next Generation Leaders Programme 2025...*” (24 March 2025 – Hong Kong) demonstrates *Ideal L2 Self*, projecting a future-oriented global leadership role. Although no captions explicitly indicated *Ought-to L2 Self*, the interview revealed it through statements about English being a requirement for future work in international NGOs.

Overall, compared to the before-study phase, all three students displayed stronger motivational expressions during the study period, with IS3 showing the highest engagement through both captions and interview data.

Discussion

Changes in Language Style in Instagram Captions of international Students

The findings reveal notable differences in language style use before and during study abroad. One striking change is the decline of posts without captions: from 27 posts (27.27%) before to 30 posts (16.57%) during the study period. This shift shows greater awareness of captions as a communicative tool to engage broader audiences, consistent with Padgett and Curwood’s (2016) view that online writing fosters self-expression and interaction. Students also mix English with local expressions to balance global reach and cultural authenticity (Shalihah, 2025; García & Wei, 2014).

Posts in other languages also decreased sharply, from 17 (17.17%) before to 5 (2.76%) during the study phase, indicating adaptation to an English-dominated environment. As IS2 explained:

“Before I wrote captions in Urdu, because all my friends, followers from Pakistan, they know the language. But after I moved here, my followers are from all over the world... so that’s why I post in English, because everyone knows.”

This statement highlights a shift from local to global audiences, with English functioning as a lingua franca (Tu, 2018).

In terms of styles, casual remained dominant (41.41% before; 39.23% during), reflecting the relaxed, fast-paced norms of social media (Juditha, 2019; Sibtiyah & Latief, 2023). Captions like *“Ready to New Normal! 🌊”* illustrate this trend. However, consultative style rose markedly from 3.03% to 23.20%, often used for informative or descriptive posts, such as *“Aesthetic images of my fave place 🍷*

#pngvibesPG #indonesia.”

Formal and frozen styles also grew (from 2.02% each to 4.97%), appearing in academic or fixed expressions, while intimate style increased from 1.01% to 3.31%, reflecting personal closeness, e.g., *“Went out for some fresh air and met up with my Cantik tambu susa ❤️.”*

Overall, these changes show that studying abroad fosters more varied and context-sensitive language use. The rise of consultative, formal, and frozen styles reflects academic and professional demands, while casual and intimate styles sustain personal connections. This supports the view that international study shapes not only proficiency but also communicative flexibility across contexts (Bangun, 2024; Jannah et al., 2023).

Changes in English Learning Motivation Before and During Overseas Study

The analysis shows a marked shift in how students expressed English learning motivation before and during study abroad. In the before-study phase, most posts did not reflect learning motivation, with the majority falling into Not Relevant (53.54%), No Caption (27.27%), or Other Language (17.17%). Only 2.02% related to Learning Experience, while Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self were absent. By contrast, during the study-abroad phase, although Not Relevant remained high (53.04%), posts reflecting Learning Experience rose sharply to 19.34%, and both Ideal L2 Self (6.08%) and Ought-to L2 Self (2.21%) appeared for the first time. This pattern aligns with Dörnyei’s (2009, p. 29) claim that “the Ideal L2 Self is the central motivational dimension of the L2 self-system,” and that authentic language use in the target environment can make this vision “more vivid and elaborate,” thereby strengthening the drive to learn.

At the individual level, the patterns varied. IS1 showed the broadest

motivational range during study, with posts reflecting Learning Experience (e.g., “*It was a privilege to invigilate and assess these young minds...*”), Ought-to L2 Self (“*...get those papers done before Christmas 🥲❤️*”), and Ideal L2 Self (“*A fresh start for more deadlines to be met 🙏*”). IS1’s interview reinforced this, linking English proficiency to future career goals as an IT Manager, which resonates with Dörnyei & Ushioda’s (2011) argument that the Ideal L2 Self can act as a motivational “engine” for long-term aspirations. IS2, who initially relied heavily on non-English captions, began reflecting Learning Experience through academic engagement (“*Conference at Faculty of Education and Psychology, as an international student I enjoyed more 🍷*”) and Ideal L2 Self in aspirations to become an English teacher abroad. This supports Taguchi et al. (2009), who found that students in Asian contexts often frame motivation around professional and global opportunities. IS3 showed the strongest Ideal L2 Self orientation, celebrating academic achievements (“*I was at the best public university in the U.S. us UC Berkeley*”) while also emphasizing Learning Experience through immersion in international events like UMiCamp. Such findings echo Ushioda’s (2011) perspective on “situated motivation,” where real-life communicative contexts can exert a stronger influence than distant future goals.

These findings highlight how studying abroad not only increases the frequency of motivation-related expressions but also diversifies their types. Learning Experience becomes more salient through real interactions and academic involvement, while the Ideal L2 Self emerges as students articulate professional and personal aspirations tied to English. The occasional presence of Ought-to L2 Self underscores the influence of academic and social obligations. Overall, the results illustrate that international study contexts activate both future-oriented and situated forms of motivation, consistent with Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Ushioda’s (2011) argument that “the most powerful motivational experiences are rooted in the learner’s immediate social reality.”

The Reflection of English Learning Motivation Through Language Style in Instagram Captions

From 197 captions, only 51 (25.88%) explicitly reflected English learning motivation, confirming Lee’s (2019) view that while social media allows self-expression, not all language use indicates learning orientation. When categorized under Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, most captions (71.15%) fell into L2 Learning Experience, showing how direct encounters—academic tasks, intercultural interaction, and daily communication—shape motivation. As Dörnyei (2009) notes, “situational motives related to the immediate learning environment”

often drive learners more strongly than distant aspirations.

L2 Learning Experience was expressed mainly through consultative style (43.13%) and casual style (21.56%). Consultative captions often explained academic activities clearly for diverse audiences, reflecting Joos's (1967) notion that this style balances formality and interaction. Casual style conveyed experiences in a relaxed tone, showing that learning was integrated into everyday life. These results echo Padgett & Curwood (2016), who argue that digital platforms function as literacy practices linking personal experience and broader communities.

Ideal L2 Self, though smaller in number, showed students' long-term aspirations as competent English users. Most appeared in consultative style (9.80%), with some in formal (5.88%) and casual (5.88%). This variation suggests that future-oriented visions can be communicated in both serious and accessible tones. As Dörnyei (2009) states, the Ideal L2 Self acts as the "motivational engine" of language learning. Taguchi et al. (2009) similarly highlight how such future selves are often linked to academic or professional ambitions, while García & Wei (2014) remind us that social media expression is hybrid, combining English with local forms to reach global and local audiences simultaneously.

By contrast, Ought-to L2 Self was least frequent (7.84%), mostly in casual and intimate styles. This shows that external obligations and social pressures were rarely foregrounded, and when they were, they appeared in light, personal tones rather than formal forms. Such patterns mirror Lang and Zhang (2024), who found that external pressures on social media are often expressed informally to gain sympathy or maintain closeness. Overall, the findings indicate that:

- a) L2 Learning Experience is expressed mainly through consultative and casual styles;
- b) Ideal L2 Self through consultative and formal styles; and
- c) Ought-to L2 Self through casual and intimate styles.

This supports Thompson & Vásquez (2015), who argue that motivation on social media is shaped not only by internal vision but also by language style choices tailored to audience and context. For international students, consultative style emerges as the dominant strategy, enabling them to convey information while maintaining interpersonal closeness.

Conclusion

Before departure, international students' Instagram captions were dominated by the casual style (41.41%), reflecting relaxed peer-oriented interaction typical of social media. Consultative (5.05%), formal (2.02%), and intimate (1.01%) styles appeared only occasionally, while many posts had no captions or used other languages. Across individuals, IS1 mostly used casual and some consultative captions, IS2 posted mainly without captions or in the native language, and IS3

showed greater engagement with English through varied styles. Overall, Instagram in this phase functioned more as a space for social connectivity than as a medium for formal or motivational expression.

During the study abroad phase, language style use became more varied and purposeful. While the casual style remained important for sharing daily experiences, consultative and formal styles increased significantly, especially for academic and professional communication. IS1 relied heavily on casual style (68.63%) but also used consultative and intimate captions; IS2 posted many times without captions but introduced frozen and formal styles in academic contexts; IS3 favored consultative style (35.48%) alongside casual and formal expressions. This shows that exposure to a new environment encouraged broader linguistic flexibility and adaptation to different communicative goals. A more critical analysis of unexpected findings, such as IS2's pattern of limited caption use despite being abroad, could further strengthen the discussion by highlighting how individual agency and digital practices shape motivational expression differently.

Motivation analysis confirmed this shift. Before departure, only 2.02% of captions expressed learning motivation, all within L2 Learning Experience, while no signs of Ideal or Ought-to L2 Self appeared. During study abroad, motivation became more visible: 19.34% of captions reflected Learning Experience, 6.08% Ideal L2 Self, and 2.21% Ought-to L2 Self. IS3 displayed the strongest motivational engagement, IS1 showed a balanced profile across all three categories, and IS2 the lowest, despite offline learning motivation. Overall, the Learning Experience category dominated (71.15% of motivational captions), often expressed through consultative and casual styles, underscoring the role of direct interaction and situational factors. Meanwhile, Ideal and Ought-to L2 Self remained limited, suggesting that Instagram serves primarily as a space for documenting lived experiences rather than long-term aspirations or external obligations.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of data by involving a larger number of participants from various cultural backgrounds and host countries, providing a more representative picture of the dynamics of learning motivation and language styles among international students. Moreover, further studies should consider analyzing visual content (photos/videos) or interactions in the comment section that could provide additional context to the expression of learning motivation. It is also highly recommended to include qualitative data such as in-depth interviews to explore further the factors influencing how students express their English learning motivation and strategies through social media. Furthermore, this study opens opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration, for example by combining applied linguistics, digital media studies, and educational psychology to gain deeper insights into the relationship between digital identity, learning motivation, and language use in global contexts.

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