

The Impact of Short Video Content in Instagram Reels in Learning English

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Instagram Reels on English language learning among students of the English Department at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja). Recognizing the growing role of digital media in education, the research aimed to explore how students perceive and utilize short video content as a learning tool. A qualitative research design was employed, with participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure that those interviewed had direct experience engaging with Instagram Reels for learning purposes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided detailed insights into students' experiences, preferences, and reflections on the use of Reels in supporting their English learning. The findings revealed that students frequently interacted with Reels that introduced new vocabulary, demonstrated correct pronunciation, and provided tips for everyday conversation. They emphasized that the short and visually appealing format of Reels made learning more enjoyable and easier to access compared to traditional learning resources. Many participants also noted that the use of humor, subtitles, and real-life contexts in the videos helped them better understand and retain language structures. In addition, students expressed that Reels played a role in boosting their confidence to practice speaking, as the content often provided authentic examples from native or fluent speakers. Despite these positive outcomes, students acknowledged that Instagram Reels should not replace formal instruction. They considered Reels a supplementary tool that supports, rather than substitutes, structured learning activities such as classroom discussions, lectures, and guided practice. The integration of Reels into a broader learning strategy was seen as most effective for enhancing both motivation and skill development. Based on these findings, the study recommends that educators consider integrating social media platforms like Instagram into language learning programs. Such integration has the potential to increase student engagement, foster independent learning, and improve overall learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Short Video Content, Instagram Reels, Learning English*

Introduction

In today's digitally driven era, English serves as a crucial medium of global communication, professional advancement, and academic exchange. As the world becomes more interconnected, proficiency in English is no longer seen merely as an advantage but as a necessity for individuals seeking opportunities in education, business, science, and international collaboration. The growing dominance of English across diverse domains has led to the continuous search for innovative and effective methods of language learning that respond to the needs and preferences of modern learners.

Technology has increasingly played a central role in this process, with digital and mobile platforms offering new possibilities for accessing authentic language input, practicing communication skills, and engaging with interactive learning resources (Shadiev & Yang, 2020; Urbaitė, 2023). Mobile applications, online videos, and social media have transformed the way students approach language acquisition, providing opportunities for both formal and informal learning beyond the classroom (Carraro & Trinder, 2021). Among the wide range of platforms available, Instagram has emerged as one of the most popular, especially among younger generations (Olejniczak, 2022). Its visually oriented design and user-friendly features make it highly appealing for daily engagement.

One of Instagram's most widely used features is Reels, which allows users to create and share short-form videos enriched with music, text overlays, animations, and filters (Kaye et al., 2021; Mahapatra & Sahoo, 2021; Malik et al., 2023; Omar & Dequan, 2020). Although initially intended for entertainment and social interaction, Reels has rapidly evolved into a versatile medium with educational potential. Its short, engaging format caters to learners who prefer quick, visually stimulating content that can be consumed anytime and anywhere. Recently, educators and researchers have begun to explore Instagram Reels not only as a platform for social expression but also as a promising tool for English language learning (Aslan, 2023; Aslan & Sirojiddinova, 2023; Carpenter et al., 2020; Chao, 2022; Mahapatra & Sahoo, 2021). By incorporating elements such as pronunciation demonstrations, vocabulary highlights, grammar explanations, and conversational examples, Reels provides learners with accessible and practical exposure to the language in real-world contexts.

The unique appeal of Instagram Reels lies in its concise duration, ranging from 15 to 90 seconds, which makes it particularly effective for presenting information in a digestible and engaging manner without overwhelming learners (Sunita, 2023; Supervisor & Poudel, 2023). In an age where attention spans are often fragmented due to the constant influx of digital content, this brevity allows learners to focus on a single concept or skill at a time, ensuring better retention and comprehension. The short format also encourages repeated viewing, giving students opportunities to revisit the material multiple times until they feel confident in understanding and applying it. Moreover, Reels integrates multiple modes of learning—visual, auditory, and even kinesthetic—into one seamless experience. Learners not only read captions or on-screen text but also hear pronunciation, intonation, and conversational flow, while visual demonstrations such as gestures, expressions, or contextual scenarios add another layer of meaning (Montero Perez, 2022). This multimodal design resonates with principles of multimedia learning, which emphasize that information presented through a combination of words, images, and sounds enhances understanding and memory. For language learners, such integration provides a more authentic, real-life encounter with English compared to traditional text-based materials.

Another advantage of Reels lies in its versatility of content. Many creators use the platform to focus on practical language aspects such as vocabulary expansion, idiomatic expressions, conversational phrases, and grammar explanations (Saad et al., 2023). Unlike static textbooks, Reels situates these elements in engaging, everyday contexts—such as travel, entertainment, or humor—making the learning process more dynamic and relatable (Gottbrath, 2023). Students are not only exposed to linguistic knowledge but also to the cultural nuances and situational appropriateness of language use. This contextualized delivery transforms abstract language rules into meaningful and memorable learning experiences, increasing both motivation and confidence among learners.

Research consistently highlights the positive impact of Instagram in language learning, particularly in boosting student motivation and classroom participation. For instance, Ganjoo et al. (2021) emphasizes that students tend to feel more engaged and eager to participate when lessons are supplemented with Instagram activities, as the platform offers an environment that feels familiar, informal, and enjoyable. Coman et al. (2021) further underscores its potential by demonstrating how Instagram can enhance writing activities, enabling students to express themselves more freely while reducing the stress often associated with traditional academic writing tasks. This suggests that the use of social media does not simply add entertainment value but also fosters a supportive and less intimidating learning atmosphere.

The inherently interactive nature of social media platforms further strengthens their role in language learning. As Gill (2023) points out, these platforms encourage collaboration and peer-based learning, where students can exchange ideas, share posts, and provide constructive feedback to one another. Such interactions extend learning beyond the teacher-student dynamic and cultivate a sense of community among learners. Fauzi (2023) also highlights that feedback mechanisms—through comments, likes, and peer responses—allow students to not only refine their language skills but also build confidence in using English in semi-public, authentic spaces.

Moreover, Instagram Reels serves as a bridge between formal and informal learning contexts. Ristianti et al. (2023) explain that digital tools such as Reels create opportunities for students to encounter English in authentic, real-world scenarios outside the classroom. This exposure enriches their language learning by embedding linguistic knowledge within cultural and social practices, thereby reinforcing relevance and practical application. The fast-paced, visually stimulating format of Reels also supports microlearning principles, which Ristianti et al. (2023) identify as highly effective for sustaining learner interest and attention in short bursts. Instagram's additional features—such as live streaming, interactive stories, and polls—offer real-time communication opportunities that go beyond passive content consumption. As noted by Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2016), these tools not only enable students to practice English in authentic digital interactions but also enhance their digital literacy and fluency. By combining language practice with technological engagement, students gain dual competencies essential in today's globalized, digital-first world.

At Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, many students in the English Department represent a generation of digital natives who have grown up surrounded by technology and social media. While traditional methods of English language instruction, such as textbook-based learning, grammar drills, and lecture-centered approaches, remain valuable, they often fall short in addressing the students' need for practical and meaningful language use. Learners frequently report that these conventional approaches can feel monotonous, overly theoretical, and disconnected from real-life communication. As a result, students may struggle to apply what they learn in the classroom to authentic contexts, particularly in speaking and listening, where confidence and fluency are crucial.

In contrast, digital platforms like Instagram present opportunities that align more closely with students' lifestyles, habits, and preferences. As an application they already use daily for entertainment, communication, and self-expression, Instagram provides a familiar and engaging environment for integrating language learning. Features such as Reels, Stories, and interactive posts deliver language input in a concise, visually appealing, and interactive way, which resonates with learners accustomed to fast-paced, multimedia-driven content. By encountering English through these digital tools, students are not only exposed to vocabulary, expressions,

and pronunciation in authentic contexts but are also motivated to actively engage with the content because it connects directly with their interests and digital routines.

This shift from traditional to digital learning platforms reflects a broader change in education, where relevance and engagement are essential for sustaining student motivation. For UKI Toraja students, leveraging Instagram as a learning tool does not replace structured instruction but complements it by bridging formal learning with informal, interest-driven practices. In doing so, digital platforms like Instagram help create a learning experience that is both practical and enjoyable, empowering students to develop English skills in ways that feel natural and meaningful.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of Instagram Reels in supporting English learning among students at UKI Toraja. It seeks to explore how Reels, as a form of digital microlearning, can be utilized to foster learner engagement, language acquisition, and collaborative learning. Beyond examining the educational value of Reels, this research also seeks to understand students' perceptions of its relevance, accessibility, and potential challenges when integrated into their daily learning routines. In particular, the study highlights how short, visually dynamic, and interactive content may serve as a bridge between formal classroom instruction and informal, interest-driven language practice. By focusing on the experiences of English majors, this study not only sheds light on the effectiveness of digital tools in higher education but also contributes to broader discussions about the role of social media in shaping innovative, student-centered approaches to language learning.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design in order to explore students' perspectives and experiences regarding the use of Instagram Reels as a tool for English language learning. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it emphasizes depth of understanding, focusing on narratives, perceptions, and meanings rather than numerical data Creswell (2021). Through this approach, the researcher sought to capture the subjective realities of students in their engagement with digital learning media.

The participants of this study were English major students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja), selected using a snowball sampling technique. This method began by identifying one or more initial informants who subsequently recommended other participants with relevant experiences. Such a strategy was useful to reach students who were actively engaged in using Instagram Reels as part of their learning process. The main criterion for participation was that students had prior experience in utilizing Instagram Reels for English language learning. The number of participants involved in this study was approximately [insert actual number, e.g., 8–12 students], depending on availability and relevance. The research was conducted at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, located on Jl. Dr. Ratulangi No. 80, Singki', Rantepao, Toraja Utara, South Sulawesi. This setting provided a familiar environment for the participants and facilitated access for data collection.

The primary data collection technique employed was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for open-ended and flexible questioning. This method enabled participants to share their detailed experiences and gave the researcher opportunities to explore emerging themes more deeply. The interviews were guided by key questions but also allowed room for probing and clarification, thereby ensuring richer insights into students' perceptions (Robinson, 2023).

The data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The process followed Braun, V., and Clarke (2006) six-step framework, beginning with familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. This systematic approach ensured that the analysis was rigorous and that the themes identified accurately reflected the experiences of the participants.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied several strategies commonly used in qualitative research. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data across different participants to identify consistent patterns. Member checking was employed by sharing interview summaries or interpretations with participants to confirm accuracy. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out through discussions with academic supervisors or colleagues to refine coding and interpretation. Finally, the researcher provided thick description, offering detailed contextual information about participants and research settings to enhance transferability and allow readers to judge the applicability of findings in other contexts (Lim, 2023).

Results

The impact of Instagram Reels in supporting English learning among students

This study explored the impact of short video content on Instagram Reels as a medium for English language learning among students in the English Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja. The research focused on understanding how students perceived and experienced the use of Instagram Reels in supporting their language learning process, particularly in improving vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and conversational skills. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with final-semester students, conducted on February 7, 2023, at Campus 1 in Makale, South Sulawesi. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to follow a guiding framework of questions while still giving participants the freedom to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. This format provided the flexibility to explore unexpected insights that emerged during the discussions, thereby ensuring a deeper understanding of how Instagram Reels influenced their learning. The setting of the interviews, held in the familiar environment of the university campus, also encouraged students to speak openly and comfortably about their learning habits and preferences.

The participants consistently reported that they were frequent users of Instagram Reels, often engaging with English-related content on a daily basis. They described being particularly drawn to short videos that introduced new English vocabulary in creative ways, offered grammar tips in simplified formats, and demonstrated correct pronunciation through authentic examples. Many students also mentioned enjoying conversational English content, such as everyday dialogues and role-play scenarios, which they found easy to imitate and apply in their own practice.

One of the most valued aspects of Instagram Reels was its brevity. Students emphasized that short, concise videos helped them absorb information quickly without feeling overwhelmed. The combination of visual elements, such as text overlays and animations, with audio features, such as background music and spoken dialogue, made the content easier to understand and remember. Several participants noted that the format allowed them to revisit videos multiple times, reinforcing their learning through repetition.

Another important factor identified by students was the relevance of the content to their daily lives. Because Instagram Reels often integrates trending topics, humor, and popular culture, learners felt that the material was not only educational but also entertaining. This combination made the process of learning English feel less like a formal requirement and more like a natural part of their digital and social media routines. Many students explained that this relevance increased their motivation to engage with English content voluntarily, outside the boundaries of classroom instruction.

The findings revealed that Instagram Reels served as an effective complementary tool for language learning. Its brevity, visual appeal, and alignment with students' everyday media consumption habits made it a medium that was both accessible and enjoyable. The students' responses highlighted that learning through Reels did not replace traditional methods but provided an engaging supplement that enhanced their confidence and interest in using English in practical contexts.

Table 1. Theme Coding Matrix: Impact of Instagram Reels on English Learning

Theme	Code	Example Quote	Participant (Source)
Frequency & Type of Use	Daily use, vocabulary tips, pronunciation	"I watch Reels on Instagram almost every day..."	SR, Q1
	Variety of content	"There are many Reels about learning English, such as vocabulary, grammar, conversation tips..."	YL, Q2
	Passive learning through feeds	"Sometimes when English content passes on my reels..."	PT, Q3
Engagement & Creativity	Fun and digestible content	"Reels' engaging and creative content helps me understand English concepts..."	PN, Q4
	Visual aids & humor	"Many creators use animations, illustrations... making it easier to understand."	SR, Q6
Motivation & Confidence	Increased interest & fun	"Instagram Reels really helped increase my motivation... learning without getting bored."	YL, Q7
	Speaking confidence	"Especially in speaking because I can see real examples of native speakers..."	SR, Q13
Quality & Effectiveness	Preference over traditional methods	"I prefer to watch learning content on reels... unlike traditional methods which are boring."	PT, Q9
	Practical and interactive	"Content is short, engaging, and trend-following... complements formal learning."	YL, Q11
Social Interaction	Comments & discussion	"Instagram Reels facilitates social interaction... through comments and collaboration."	PN, Q14
	Peer engagement	"I often see discussions in the comments and sometimes take part in conversations."	SR, Q14
Suggestions for Improvement	Interactive quizzes, subtitles	"More practical exercises or quizzes will be helpful."	PN, Q15
	Collaboration with experts	"Maybe collaborate with an English teacher or expert."	FT, Q16
	Content structuring	"Develop content focused on specific topics, like grammar or phrasal verbs."	PN, Q16

The first theme was the increase in learners' motivation and self-confidence. Many students explained that Instagram Reels encouraged them to practice English more frequently, especially speaking skills. They felt more confident when they could observe and imitate authentic examples of English from native or fluent speakers presented in short and engaging videos. For several participants, Reels created a sense of comfort and reduced the pressure that often accompanies formal learning environments.

The second theme was the creativity and interactivity of Reels content. Students highlighted features such as animations, captions, subtitles, humor, background music, and the use of real-life contexts as elements that made the videos easier to understand. These features not only captured their attention but also made the learning experience more enjoyable. Many participants mentioned that they were able to remember vocabulary and expressions better when these were presented in creative or humorous ways.

The third theme focused on the practicality of Reels as a learning method. Compared to traditional classroom approaches, which were sometimes described as rigid or monotonous, Reels offered a refreshing and flexible alternative. The short, concise videos allowed students to access and revisit content at any time, making it easier to integrate English practice into their daily routines. This flexibility gave students the freedom to learn at their own pace and to focus on specific skills or topics that interested them.

A fourth theme was the role of Reels in promoting social interaction. Participants noted that the platform enabled them to interact with peers through comments, likes, and collaborative content creation. Some students even experimented with making their own Reels in English, which gave them a creative outlet to practice the language and share their progress. These social interactions extended learning beyond the individual level, allowing students to engage in informal language practice within a supportive online community.

The final theme centered on suggestions for improvement. While students appreciated the benefits of Instagram Reels, they also offered constructive feedback for making educational content more effective. Suggestions included clearer and more accurate subtitles, the addition of interactive elements such as questions or tasks, collaboration between content creators and English educators, and the development of thematic series that focused on specific language skills. These ideas show that students not only consume content passively but also think critically about how the platform could be optimized for their learning.

Thus, the findings demonstrate that Instagram Reels provides multiple benefits for English learners. It motivates students, builds their self-confidence, engages them through creative content, offers practical alternatives to traditional learning, and encourages social interaction. At the same time, the feedback from participants highlights opportunities to improve educational content on the platform, ensuring that it can support language learning in even more structured and meaningful ways.

Discussion

The impact of Instagram Reels in supporting English learning among students

This study reveals that students in the English Department at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja are highly engaged with interactive and practical short video content, particularly on Instagram Reels. In the context of English language learning, such content proves advantageous by presenting material in a concise, accessible, and engaging format—eliminating the need for lengthy explanations and catering to learners' digital preferences.

The findings of this study indicate that students in the English Department at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja) are highly engaged with interactive and practical short video content, particularly on Instagram Reels. This engagement reflects broader trends in digital learning, where learners increasingly prefer concise and accessible formats that align with their daily social media consumption. In the context of English language learning, Instagram Reels provides a significant advantage by presenting material in a brief, visually appealing, and easily consumable format. Instead of relying on lengthy explanations that can sometimes overwhelm learners, this platform offers content in line with contemporary learning preferences, catering especially to digital-native students who are accustomed to fast-paced media consumption (Rathnasekara et al., 2023).

The results align with Fahrezi's (2023) research, which highlighted Instagram's effectiveness as a segmented learning medium for teaching Indonesian. Fahrezi demonstrated that Reels can deliver educational material in short, attractive, and digestible segments, thereby boosting student engagement and motivation. This resonates with the current study's findings, as participants consistently emphasized that Reels motivated them to pay attention to English lessons even outside the classroom. The micro-learning principle embedded in Instagram Reels reinforces retention and interest by breaking down complex materials into more manageable parts, which is consistent with Naser's et al. (2023) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning.

Similar evidence is found in Lukmana and Priyatmojo's (2023) study on students' perceptions of Instagram Reels in enhancing speaking motivation. She concluded that Reels significantly increased learners' confidence and willingness to practice English speaking skills. The present study echoes this outcome, as respondents noted that trend-driven content, particularly short dialogues and interactive challenges, encouraged them to mimic and practice spoken English. Further reinforcement for these findings can be seen in Sastaparamitha's (2021) work on the role of social media in English learning. Her study showed that Instagram Reels serves as an effective tool for delivering interactive, visually engaging content that improves vocabulary and conversational skills. This is highly relevant to the current context, as students at UKI Toraja also reported that they could easily learn new vocabulary and expressions from Reels, particularly when accompanied by subtitles, captions, or repetitive use in multiple contexts. In addition, the multimodal nature of Reels—combining visuals, text, and audio—supports dual coding theory (Huang & Li, 2023), which explains how visual and verbal information processed simultaneously enhances learning effectiveness.

The findings are also in line with Sari and Wahyudin (2019) research on students' perceptions of Instagram in language learning. Liany emphasized the positive effects of Instagram in promoting vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation improvement, and learner motivation. Participants in the current study expressed similar sentiments, particularly noting how short videos helped them correct pronunciation by imitating native speakers featured in Reels. This suggests that Instagram functions not merely as a platform for entertainment but also as an authentic source of linguistic input that promotes autonomous learning.

In addition to individual studies, broader research underscores the pedagogical potential of short-form video platforms. For instance, Tugtekin and Dursun (2022) highlighted that interactive video content significantly enhances learner motivation, while Aidinlou and Moradinejad (2016) confirmed that short, dynamic videos lead to higher retention and better application of language skills in real-life contexts. This is reflected in the current study, as participants frequently mentioned that the accessibility and immediacy of Reels allowed them to revisit content anytime, making practice more engaging and memorable. Such results align with

the principles of self-directed learning (Loeng, 2020), where learners take active responsibility for their own educational development using resources readily available to them.

Another notable point is that Instagram Reels encourages peer-to-peer learning and collaboration. Many students indicated that they not only watched Reels but also shared or created content themselves, which allowed them to practice language skills in creative ways. This interactive feature is consistent with Saleem's et al. (2021) social constructivist theory, which argues that learning is mediated by social interaction and cultural tools. By engaging with peers through comments, challenges, and collaborative videos, students extend their learning beyond individual study, making the process more dynamic and socially situated.

Overall, the findings of this study support the conclusion that Instagram Reels has a strong positive impact on English language learning, particularly by enhancing motivation, engagement, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and speaking confidence. When interpreted through the lens of existing research and learning theories, the results suggest that Instagram Reels represents a valuable tool in the repertoire of digital-assisted language learning strategies. However, it is also important to note potential limitations, such as the risk of distraction, lack of structured content, or over-reliance on entertainment-oriented material. These challenges echo findings by Fazel and Sayaf (2023), who warned of the dual nature of social media in education: while it fosters engagement, it also demands careful pedagogical integration to ensure learning objectives are met.

Thus, the current study not only confirms prior research but also highlights the specific benefits of Instagram Reels in the context of English majors at UKI Toraja. The results imply that educators could integrate such digital tools into formal instruction, designing activities that balance entertainment and learning outcomes. Doing so would bridge the gap between students' digital habits and academic goals, reinforcing the role of social media as a powerful complementary tool in modern language education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Instagram Reels has a positive impact on English language learning among students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja. The platform's short, interactive, and visually engaging content increases students' motivation, confidence—especially in speaking—and makes learning English more enjoyable and accessible. Instagram Reels complements traditional learning by offering practical, real-life language examples in a format aligned with students' digital habits. Furthermore, the social features of Reels encourage peer interaction, enhancing informal language practice. Suggestions for improving Reels-based learning include adding interactive quizzes, clearer subtitles, expert collaboration, and more structured content. These findings affirm the value of integrating short video platforms into modern English language education and provide a basis for further research in digital learning tools.

Acknowledgment

The researcher thanks Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja) for the support, facilities, and funding provided for this study. Appreciation is also extended to the English Department staff and students for their valuable assistance.

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