

Students' Perception Toward the Use of Instagram Reels in Enhancing Vocabulary Development at Senior High School

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2952>*Feit Putra Anugrah, Wahyudin, Andi Patmasari, Jamiluddin ¹²³⁴English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Tadulako University, Sulawesi Tengah, Indonesia*Corresponding Author: feitputraanugrah17@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of using Instagram Reels for learning English vocabulary at SMAN 5 Palu. In today's digital era, social media platforms have become increasingly popular as educational tools that support language learning, particularly vocabulary development. Despite their widespread use, limited research has explored students' perceptions of Instagram Reels as a learning medium in the classroom. Therefore, this study aimed to describe students' perceptions of the usefulness, engagement, and effectiveness of Instagram Reels in vocabulary learning. This research employed a quantitative descriptive design involving 30 senior high school students as the respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify students' responses. The findings revealed that the majority of students held positive perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels. They believed that the platform helped them learn new vocabulary, improve pronunciation, remember word meanings more easily, and increased their motivation and interest in learning English. In conclusion, Instagram Reels can be considered an effective, engaging, and accessible medium for enhancing English vocabulary learning among senior high school students.

Keywords: *Students' Perceptions Instagram Reels; Vocabulary Learning; English Learning; Social Media.***Article History:**Received 27th June 2026Accepted 10th July 2026Published 03th July 2026

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the most fundamental components of English language learning because it supports learners' ability to communicate effectively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, students often experience difficulties understanding texts, expressing ideas, and participating in classroom communication. Therefore, vocabulary development remains one of the primary goals in English Language Teaching (ELT). In recent years, educators have increasingly integrated digital technology into language learning to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences. The rapid development of mobile technology and social media has provided students with opportunities to learn English beyond the traditional classroom environment through authentic and interactive learning resources.

Among various social media platforms, Instagram has become one of the most popular applications among teenagers worldwide, including Indonesian senior high school students. One of its most attractive features is Instagram Reels, which allows users to create and watch short-form videos containing visual, audio, and textual information. Unlike conventional learning materials, Instagram Reels presents language in authentic contexts through subtitles, narration, animations, and real-life situations. These multimodal characteristics are believed to facilitate vocabulary acquisition by helping learners connect word meanings, pronunciation, and usage simultaneously. Moreover, the short duration of Reels encourages repeated exposure to vocabulary, which is considered essential for long-term retention.

The increasing integration of technology into education is also supported by the Indonesian educational system. Under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative, flexible, and technology-based instructional strategies that promote student-centered learning. Social media platforms such as Instagram have therefore become potential supplementary learning resources, particularly because they correspond to students' daily digital habits. Many educational content creators now publish English learning videos focusing on vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and expressions, enabling students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere. This flexibility allows students to engage in informal learning outside classroom hours while maintaining their motivation and interest in English.

Previous studies have demonstrated the educational potential of Instagram Reels and other short-form video platforms in English language learning. Marsakawati et al. (2022) reported that Instagram Reels helped university students connect newly learned vocabulary with authentic professional contexts, improving both comprehension and retention. Widari (2024) found that senior high school students who learned vocabulary through Instagram Reels achieved significantly higher vocabulary retention than those using conventional memorization methods. Similarly, Rosdiani et al. (2022) revealed that Instagram-based learning improved students' vocabulary recognition, vocabulary usage, and long-term retention because learners encountered vocabulary in authentic communicative contexts. Other researchers have also highlighted that Instagram's interactive features, including comments, quizzes, and discussions, increase learners' motivation and encourage active participation in vocabulary learning (Lestari & German, 2021).

Studies conducted in various international contexts have also reported similar findings. Sarangapani & Hashim (2022) concluded that students acquired vocabulary incidentally while watching and producing Instagram Reels, supporting the idea that meaningful language exposure contributes to natural language acquisition. Beltrán-Flandoli et al. (2025) emphasized that educational content creators on Instagram provide authentic linguistic input that supports vocabulary development. Furthermore, Lee (2023) found that repeated exposure to topic-based short videos significantly enhanced both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In Indonesia, Garini (2025) and Hikmah et al. (2024) similarly reported that students perceived Instagram as an enjoyable and motivating platform that facilitated vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, and pronunciation practice.

Despite the growing number of studies investigating Instagram as a learning medium, several research gaps remain. Most previous studies focused on measuring learning outcomes, vocabulary achievement, or the effectiveness of instructional interventions using experimental designs. Only limited research has specifically explored senior high school students' perceptions of Instagram Reels as a vocabulary learning tool within the Indonesian educational context. Furthermore, empirical evidence regarding students in Central Sulawesi, particularly at SMAN 5 Palu, is still scarce. Understanding students' perceptions is important because positive perceptions may influence motivation, engagement, and willingness to utilize social media as an independent learning resource.

Instagram Reels has a strong theoretical relationship with vocabulary learning because it provides learners with authentic, multimodal, and contextualized language input that facilitates vocabulary acquisition. According to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, students learn more effectively when information is presented through both visual and auditory channels, enabling them to process and retain new vocabulary more efficiently (Richard E Mayer, 2021). Similarly, Dual Coding Theory suggests that combining verbal information with images creates two cognitive representations, strengthening memory and recall of vocabulary (Paivio, 2006). Instagram Reels incorporates short videos, captions, subtitles, images, music, and spoken language, allowing learners to encounter vocabulary in meaningful contexts while simultaneously improving pronunciation and comprehension. Furthermore, Krashen's Input Hypothesis argues that language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level (Krashen,

1985). The engaging and repetitive nature of Instagram Reels also increases learners' motivation and attention, which are important factors for successful vocabulary learning. Therefore, Instagram Reels serves as an effective digital learning medium by integrating multimedia features, authentic language exposure, and meaningful contextual learning that supports vocabulary acquisition.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in learning English vocabulary at SMAN 5 Palu. Specifically, the study investigates how students perceive the usefulness, effectiveness, enjoyment, and challenges of using Instagram Reels as a supplementary vocabulary learning medium. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on technology-enhanced language learning and provide practical insights for English teachers in integrating social media into vocabulary instruction more effectively.

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Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in learning English vocabulary. A descriptive quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe and summarize students' perceptions without manipulating any variables or examining causal relationships. The research focused on identifying students' attitudes, experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges regarding the use of Instagram Reels as a supplementary medium for vocabulary learning. The findings were presented using descriptive statistics to provide a comprehensive overview of students' perceptions.

Respondents

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in learning English vocabulary. The study was conducted at SMAN 5 Palu during the 2025/2026 academic year. The respondents consisted of 30 senior high school students selected using purposive sampling. The participants were chosen based on three criteria: (1) they had actively used Instagram for at least six months, (2) they frequently watched Instagram Reels containing English vocabulary content, and (3) they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that the respondents had sufficient experience with Instagram Reels to provide meaningful responses regarding its use as a vocabulary learning medium.

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questionnaire contained sixteen statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). These statements measured students' perceptions of the usefulness, effectiveness, motivation, engagement, and challenges of learning English vocabulary through Instagram Reels. In addition, several open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to explain their opinions and experiences in greater detail. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed and validated by experts to ensure its content validity, clarity, and relevance.

Procedures

After obtaining permission from the school, the validated questionnaire was distributed to the selected respondents. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. They completed the questionnaire voluntarily, either in printed form or through an online platform, depending on accessibility. All completed questionnaires were collected and checked before proceeding to the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the close-ended questionnaire were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were calculated to describe students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in learning English vocabulary. The mean scores were interpreted according to the predetermined Likert scale categories. Meanwhile, responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis by grouping similar responses into common themes. The qualitative findings were used to complement and strengthen the interpretation of the quantitative results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings obtained from both the close-ended and open-ended questionnaires administered to 30 eleventh-grade students at SMAN 5 Palu. The close-ended questionnaire was designed to identify students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in enhancing vocabulary development, whereas the open-ended questionnaire was intended to explore students' experiences, opinions, and challenges in greater depth. The quantitative findings are first presented in a summary table, followed by a description of the qualitative findings.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Responses to the Close-Ended Questionnaire

Item	Questionnaire statement	Dominant response	percentage	Interpretation
P1	Instagram reels make vocabulary learning more interesting	agree	43.3%	Positive
P2	Instagram reels helps me remember vocabulary more easily	agree	46.7%	Positive
P3	Instagram reels helps me understand word meanings better	Neutral	53.3%	moderate
P4	I learn new vocabulary unintentionally while watching instagram reels	agree	43.3%	Positive
P5	Instagram reels improve pronunciation and listening skills	Neutral	53.3%	Moderate
P6	Instagram reels motivates me to learn English	Neutral	60.0%	Moderate
P7	Learning vocabulary through Instagram reels is enjoyable	Neutral	35.3%	Moderate
P8	Captions and subtitles help me understand English content	Agree/Neutral	36.7%	Positive
P9	I use vocabulary learned from Instagram reels in daily communication	Neutral	70.0%	Moderate
P10	Instagram reels can sometimes distract me from learning	Neutral	60.0%	Moderate
P11	Not all Instagram reels content is suitable for learning English vocabulary	Neutral	40.0%	Moderate
P12	I sometimes have difficulty understanding the vocabulary used in Instagram reels	Agree	46.7%	Positive
P13	I use Instagram more often for entertainment than for learning	Neutral	46.7%	Moderate
P14	Internet connection affects the effectiveness of my learning	Neutral	50.0%	Moderate
P15	I learn new vocabulary through comments or discussions on Instagram reels	Neutral	53.3%	Moderate
P16	Repeated exposure to vocabulary helps me remember words longer	Neutreal	43.3%	Moderate

Item P12 is a negatively worded statement. Agreement indicates that students experienced vocabulary difficulties while watching Instagram Reels. As shown in Table 1, the findings indicate that students generally demonstrated positive perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels as a supplementary medium for vocabulary learning. Positive responses were primarily found in statements related to learning interest, vocabulary retention, and incidental vocabulary acquisition. The highest level of agreement appeared in Item P2 (46.7%), indicating that students believed Instagram Reels helped them remember vocabulary more easily. Similarly, 43.3% of respondents agreed that Instagram Reels made vocabulary learning more interesting (Item P1) and enabled them to learn new vocabulary unintentionally while watching English content (Item P4). These findings suggest that Instagram Reels provides meaningful vocabulary exposure through authentic audiovisual materials.

Although positive perceptions dominated several items, neutral responses were also frequently observed. The highest neutral response occurred in Item P9 (70.0%), indicating that most students did not consistently apply newly learned vocabulary in their daily communication. Neutral responses were also dominant in Items P3, P5, P6, P7, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, and P16, suggesting that students were uncertain about the effectiveness of Instagram Reels in improving pronunciation, motivation, vocabulary retention, and communicative use. Therefore, students tended to perceive Instagram Reels as a supportive learning resource rather than a primary instructional medium.

The findings from the open-ended questionnaire supported the quantitative results. Students reported that they frequently watched English-related content such as vocabulary lessons, pronunciation tutorials, grammar explanations, podcasts, English stories, motivational videos, and educational content. They identified captions, subtitles, visual illustrations, translation features, repeated exposure to vocabulary, and short-video formats as the most useful features for vocabulary learning. These features enabled students to understand unfamiliar words more easily while increasing their interest in learning English.

Despite these positive perceptions, students also identified several challenges. The most common difficulties included unstable internet connections, rapid speech from speakers, unfamiliar vocabulary, limited video duration, and distractions caused by entertainment content. Nevertheless, most participants believed that Instagram Reels should be integrated into English language learning because it creates a more engaging learning environment and provides authentic English exposure. However, they emphasized that successful implementation requires appropriate teacher guidance and careful selection of learning materials.

To obtain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in enhancing vocabulary development, an open-ended questionnaire consisting of five questions was administered. The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which similar responses were grouped into common themes. Table 2 summarizes the main themes identified from students' responses.

Table 2. Summary of Findings the Open-Ended Questionnaire

Question	Main theme	Summary of students' responses
Q1	Type of English content	Students frequently watched vocabulary lessons, pronunciation tutorials, grammar explanations, podcasts, English stories, motivational videos, and educational content. Entertainment content such as football videos, K-pop interviews, comedy clips, and mini-vlogs was also commonly viewed.
Q2	Learning support features	Students reported that captions, subtitles, visual demonstrations, translation features, audio exposure, repeated vocabulary, and the short-video format helped them understand and remember new vocabulary more effectively.
Q3	Learning challenges	Students experienced several difficulties, including unstable internet connections, rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, limited video duration, distractions from unrelated content, and the absence of subtitles or translations in some videos.

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Q4	Opinions on Classroom use	Most students supported the integration of Instagram Reels into English classes because it makes learning more interesting, interactive, and enjoyable. However, they emphasized the importance of teacher guidance and appropriate content selection to avoid distractions.
Q5	Most Useful Features	Subtitles and captions were the most frequently mentioned features, followed by translation tools, audio features, visual context, sharing features, and comment sections, all of which supported vocabulary learning and pronunciation practice.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that students perceived Instagram Reels as a valuable supplementary medium for vocabulary learning. The responses revealed that students were exposed to a wide variety of English-language content, ranging from educational materials such as vocabulary lessons, pronunciation tutorials, grammar explanations, podcasts, and English stories to entertainment content including football videos, K-pop interviews, comedy clips, and mini-vlogs. This variety of content provided authentic opportunities for students to encounter English vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Students also identified several features that supported vocabulary learning. Captions and subtitles were the most frequently mentioned because they helped students connect spoken and written forms of English while improving comprehension. Other useful features included visual demonstrations, translation tools, repeated exposure to vocabulary, audio input from native speakers, and the short-video format, which maintained students' attention and encouraged continuous learning.

Despite these benefits, students reported several challenges in learning through Instagram Reels. The most common obstacles included unstable internet connections, rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, limited video duration, distractions from unrelated content, and the absence of subtitles or translations in some videos. These findings indicate that technological and linguistic factors may influence the effectiveness of Instagram Reels as a learning medium.

Students expressed positive opinions regarding the integration of Instagram Reels into English language learning. They believed that the platform could make learning more engaging, interactive, and enjoyable while increasing their exposure to authentic English. Nevertheless, many respondents emphasized that teacher guidance and careful selection of educational content are essential to maximize learning benefits and minimize potential distractions.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions toward the use of Instagram Reels in enhancing vocabulary development. The close-ended questionnaire showed an overall positive tendency ($M = 3.57$), suggesting that students viewed Instagram Reels as a beneficial supplementary learning medium. The highest mean scores were obtained for Item P1 ($M = 3.93$), indicating that Instagram Reels made vocabulary learning more interesting, and Item P2 ($M = 3.90$), demonstrating that students believed Instagram Reels helped them remember vocabulary more easily. Similarly, Item P4 ($M = 3.80$) showed that students unintentionally acquired new vocabulary while watching English-related content. These findings suggest that Instagram Reels provides authentic and engaging learning experiences that support incidental vocabulary acquisition.

The positive perceptions found in this study support Mayer (2024) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which proposes that learning becomes more effective when learners process verbal and visual information simultaneously. Instagram Reels combines spoken language, written captions, subtitles, images, animations, and contextual visual information into short videos that facilitate dual-channel processing. As a result, students are able to associate new vocabulary with meaningful visual contexts, making vocabulary easier to understand and retain. The positive responses toward Items P1, P2, P4, and P8 demonstrate

that multimedia elements provided by Instagram Reels contribute to students' vocabulary learning experiences.

The findings are also consistent with Vygotsky (1978) Social Constructivism Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through meaningful interaction with others and authentic learning environments. Students reported that they frequently watched vocabulary lessons, pronunciation tutorials, grammar explanations, podcasts, and English stories through Instagram Reels. They also benefited from captions, subtitles, translation features, and repeated exposure to English vocabulary. These findings indicate that Instagram Reels provides opportunities for students to interact with authentic English-language input beyond the classroom, allowing vocabulary learning to occur naturally through social media engagement rather than solely through formal instruction.

The present findings are in line with previous studies on social media-assisted vocabulary learning. Fadhlillah & Yunianti (2024) found that Instagram Reels enhances vocabulary acquisition by providing authentic English input through short and engaging multimedia content. Likewise, Widari (2024) reported that students who used Instagram Reels demonstrated higher vocabulary retention and greater learning enjoyment than those who relied on conventional learning activities. Similarly, Hasani et al. (2025) concluded that educational Instagram content increased students' engagement and motivation because the platform reflected learners' daily interests and digital habits. The consistency between the present findings and previous studies strengthens the argument that Instagram Reels can serve as an effective supplementary medium for vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms.

Although students generally perceived Instagram Reels positively, several findings indicate that the platform also has limitations. Most respondents selected neutral responses for Items P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, and P16, suggesting that students were uncertain about the effectiveness of Instagram Reels in improving pronunciation, increasing motivation, promoting vocabulary use in daily communication, and supporting long-term vocabulary retention. The highest neutral response was found in Item P9 (70.0%), indicating that students rarely applied vocabulary learned from Instagram Reels in real-life communication. These results imply that exposure to vocabulary alone may not be sufficient to encourage productive vocabulary use without meaningful practice in authentic communicative situations.

The open-ended questionnaire further explains these findings by revealing several challenges experienced by students. Participants reported unstable internet connections, rapid speech from content creators, unfamiliar vocabulary, limited video duration, distractions caused by entertainment content, and the absence of subtitles or translations in some videos. These challenges suggest that although Instagram Reels provides rich multimedia input, technological constraints and content quality may influence its effectiveness as a learning medium. Therefore, students may require additional guidance to maximize the educational benefits of the platform.

Another important finding is that most students supported the integration of Instagram Reels into English language teaching. They believed that the platform makes learning more interesting, enjoyable, interactive, and motivating. However, students also emphasized that teacher supervision and appropriate content selection are necessary to ensure that Instagram Reels functions as an educational resource rather than merely an entertainment platform. This finding highlights the important role of teachers in selecting reliable educational content, providing learning activities related to the videos, and encouraging students to apply newly learned vocabulary through classroom interaction and communication.

The findings demonstrate that Instagram Reels has considerable potential to enhance vocabulary development by providing authentic English-language exposure, multimedia learning experiences, and opportunities for autonomous learning. Nevertheless, the platform should be viewed as a complementary learning resource rather than a substitute for classroom instruction. The successful integration of Instagram Reels into English language teaching depends not only on the availability of digital technology but also on effective instructional

guidance, appropriate content selection, and meaningful opportunities for students to use newly acquired vocabulary in real communication.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' perceptions of using Instagram Reels to enhance vocabulary development at SMAN 5 Palu. Employing a descriptive quantitative design supported by qualitative data from close-ended and open-ended questionnaires, the study found that students generally held positive perceptions of Instagram Reels as a vocabulary learning medium. Most respondents agreed that the platform made learning more engaging, enjoyable, and effective in helping them remember new vocabulary through authentic English content, captions, subtitles, and repeated exposure. The open-ended responses revealed that students frequently accessed educational content, including vocabulary lessons, pronunciation tutorials, grammar explanations, and podcasts, which enriched their language learning experiences beyond the classroom. However, students also reported several challenges, such as unstable internet connections, limited mobile data, fast speech, distracting content, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Despite these limitations, the findings indicate that Instagram Reels provides authentic, multimodal, and motivating learning experiences. Therefore, it can serve as an effective supplementary resource for supporting English vocabulary acquisition and enhancing students' motivation to learn.

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