

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SHORTS BOOST ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: REAL RESULTS FROM INSTAGRAM REELS

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Abstract

The fleet-footed growth of social media platforms has transformed the way individuals engross and interact with digital content. Among these, short-form videos such as Instagram Reels have emanated as powerful tools for language learning. This study explores how social media shorts can enhance English language acquisition by promoting authentic exposure, cross-media learning, and increased learner motivation. Drawing on real results from Instagram Reels, the research accentuate how short, engaging videos foster vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, cultural understanding, and communicative proficiency. Findings acknowledge that learners benefit from the immediacy of visual and auditory input, the contextualized use of everyday English, and the interactive nature of user engagement. The paper concludes that integrating social media shorts into English language learning strategies provides a dynamic, accessible, and learner-centered approach that complements traditional pedagogies.

Keywords: English language accretion, Instagram Reels, social media learning, short-form videos, vocabulary retention, cross-media learning, digital pedagogy

Introduction

Gone are the days of great challenges in acquiring English Language. The students struggle with the traditional methods like vocabulary retention and real –world application. Flashcards and textbook exercises have been in use for decades. This has made the learners unable to recall words when they need it. In the present scenario recent research reveals that short-form videos on social media platforms are changing this perspective dramatically.

Instagram Reels, with their bite-sized, visually engaging format, have emanated as powerful tools for vocabulary learning. These short-form videos combine to serve as entertainment with education, creating what educators call “edutainment”. The content of the reels keeps learners engaged while concomitantly building their language skills. A recent study shows that Instagram Reels-based learning achieved an impressive 58.72% effectiveness rate based on N-gain score interpretation, significantly surmount traditional teaching methods.

This article canvasses how multimedia-based language learning through social media shorts enriches vocabulary acquisition, hunts the specific features of Instagram Reels that make them effective for language learning, and presents real data from experimental research. In addition,

we'll discuss practical strategies for classroom integration and address potential challenges of incorporating digital content into language learning.

Challenges in Traditional Vocabulary Learning

Traditional methods of acquiring vocabulary often fail to produce lasting results, this is basically due to fundamental flaws in how words are presented and practiced. These approaches are still prevalent in language learning, which create significant barriers to effective language acquisition.

Rote memorization leads to low retention

Rote memorization has been historically dominant in vocabulary teaching, but it presents serious limitations for long-term language development. This technique relies on mechanical repetition without requiring learners to understand meaning or context. Consequently, students may temporarily recall vocabulary for tests but struggle to retrieve these words weeks or months later.

The research demonstrates that mere repetition overpowers short-term memory, which cannot effectively process more than seven items before becoming saturated. According to cognitive psychologists, this limitation (called "The Magical Number Seven, Plus Or Minus Two") explains why presenting students with lengthy word lists results in poor retention.

Furthermore, studies comparing rote learning with alternative methods reveal distinct differences in credibility. While rote learners successfully recalled vocabulary at a mere 28% rate, those using memory techniques achieved 88% or better retention. This substantial gap underscores why many students, despite years of language study, struggle with basic vocabulary application.

Lack of contextual usage in classroom settings

The absence of contextual learning represents another critical shortcoming in traditional vocabulary teaching. Classroom environments typically present words in isolation, divorced from authentic usage scenarios that facilitate deeper understanding. This approach stands in stark contrast to how we naturally acquire language.

Academic researchers highlight that bidding circumstances provide simulated simplified contexts clear teacher pronunciation, basic textbook sentences, and visual aids. Conversely, natural environments feature expeditious speech, complex sentence structures, and references to distant objects or past events. This dissimilarity creates what researchers term "negative transfer" when students attempt to apply classroom vocabulary in real-world settings.

Studies examining different learning contexts found that students exposed to natural settings developed significantly greater oral fluency than those in traditional environments additionally, experiments with "contextualization" groups students trained to guess word meanings from surrounding context showed markedly improved performance on vocabulary tests.

Limited student engagement with textbook methods

Traditional vocabulary teaching typically creates passive learning environments that fail to garner student interest or promote active participation. Many educators rely excessively on direct instruction and employ uninteresting activities that don't encourage student engagement. In one particular study, students described traditional vocabulary tutelage as "more than boring and ineffective, "noting them" could not remember the words at all "despite extensive teacher explication. The class observation revealed students couldn't maintain focus during vocabulary lessons, even though both teachers and learners invested significant preparation time.

The problem extends beyond mere lassitude. Traditional approaches often neglect to teach students *how* to remember vocabulary effectively. As one researcher notes, “you can't just present students with a list of vocabulary and magically expect them to remember it”. This fundamental oversight explains why many learners make minimal progress despite considerable effort.

Essentially, traditional vocabulary teaching faces a triple challenge: it overwhelms cognitive capacity through rote methods, fails to provide authentic context for word usage, and creates disengaging learning experiences that diminish motivation and attention precisely the elements crucial for effective language acquisition.

Instagram Reels as a Language Learning Tool

Instagram has evolved beyond a photo-sharing platform into a powerful language learning tool through innovative features like Instagram Reels. Launched in August 2020, this feature offers unique opportunities for vocabulary acquisition in ways traditional methods cannot match.

Short-form video format and its cognitive benefits

The short-form video format of Instagram Reels aligns perfectly with microlearning principles, allowing learners to absorb information in brief yet intensive sessions. Research indicates that short videos improve knowledge acquisition primarily in the short term. This format proves especially effective because it reduces cognitive load for language learners, making complex vocabulary more digestible.

Specifically, Instagram Reels' concise format (15-90 seconds) helps minimize the influence of learners' individual cognition differences, creating a more level learning field. This brevity particularly benefits today's students who are accustomed to audiovisual and networked environments, making learning a natural feel rather than forced.

Research reveals that using Instagram for vocabulary learning resulted in a remarkable 76.7% impact rate, classified as “Very High” among university students. This demonstrates how the audiovisual nature of Reels creates stronger mental associations for vocabulary retention.

Interactive elements: captions, hashtags, and audio

Instagram Reels incorporates several interactive elements that enhance language acquisition:

- **Hashtags for contextual learning:** Data shows hashtags assist students in learning vocabulary within relevant contextual frameworks, addressing the context deficit in traditional methods.
- **Customizable components:** Features like background music, effects, filters, playback speed adjustment, and transitions increase visual appeal and engagement.
- **Audio integration:** Reels allows embedding music or original audio, creating associations between vocabulary and sound.
- **Text overlays:** Captions help reinforce vocabulary visually while simultaneously hearing pronunciation.

The multimodal approach of Reels combining images, videos, and text promotes better understanding and memory retention. In fact, students reported that these visual and interactive elements significantly increased their interest in vocabulary learning.

Reels vs. Stories vs. Filters: Feature comparison

Each Instagram feature offers distinct advantages for language acquisition:

Instagram Reels stands out with its dedicated feed tab and longer shelf life compared to Stories. Reels provide advanced editing capabilities, including trending audio tracks, speed

control, alignment features, and automatic captions. As an educational tool, Reels excel in demonstrating vocabulary in action rather than simply explaining it.

Instagram Stories last only 24 hours, making them ideal for daily vocabulary practice but less suitable for reference material. They create stronger immediate connections but lack Reels' discovery potential, with 74% of Instagram users actively engaging with Reels content.

Instagram Filters utilize augmented reality (AR) technology to enhance learning experiences. Research shows filters are effective for teaching vocabulary, with one study confirming their success in improving students' vocabulary comprehension. Filters can incorporate vocabulary directly into interactive experiences.

The combination of visual storytelling and peer interaction through comments and shares makes Instagram Reels particularly effective for fostering authentic language use. Unlike traditional textbook approaches, Reels create an interactive learning community where vocabulary exists in practical, engaging contexts.

Experimental Design and Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of Instagram Reels as a vocabulary learning tool, researchers designed a methodical approach that combined digital content creation with traditional assessment techniques. This experimental framework established a clear pathway for measuring language acquisition outcomes through social media shorts.

Participant selection and sampling criteria

Most studies examining Instagram Reels' impact on vocabulary acquisition employed purposive sampling methods to select appropriate participants. One study focused on 10 students from the JF Academy of Communicative English, Tirupattur during the 2024/2025 academic year. These participants were specifically chosen based on their regular Instagram usage as a vocabulary learning platform.

Similarly, another investigation utilized a sample of 26 high school students from class X YMCA Brown Memorial, Matric, Hr, Sec, School, Tirupattur. A larger study involving Higher Secondary students from YMCA BMMHSS selected 25 participants through purposive sampling, targeting those who actively used Instagram for language learning.

The selection criteria typically included:

- Prior experience with social media platforms
- Current status as language learners
- Willingness to engage with educational content through Instagram

This approach aligns with research showing social media recruitment facilitates accessibility to participants from diverse populations and geographical areas.

Pre-test and post-test structure for vocabulary assessment

The experimental design primarily relied on pre-test and post-test assessments to measure vocabulary improvement. This straightforward evaluation framework involves conducting assessments before and after intervention to determine whether expected changes occurred.

In most studies, identical measures were used for both pre-test and post-test to ensure consistency in assessment. For instance, one study administered a 20-item multiple-choice questionnaire focusing on specific grammar components taught during the experimental period.

Results from these assessments yielded compelling evidence for the effectiveness of Instagram Reels. In one study, the mean score of students' lexical achievement after Instagram Reels

instruction was 88.46 in the post-test, representing a significant 26.54-point improvement from the pre-test average of 61.92.

Instagram Reels content creation and delivery plan

The content creation strategy centered on developing short, engaging videos that effectively presented vocabulary in context. Visual elements were prioritized, as 10 out of 10 respondents in one study reported discovering and successfully mastering new vocabulary through Instagram content such as info graphics and short videos.

Throughout the experimental period, participants generally dedicated approximately one hour daily to exploring vocabulary-focused videos on Instagram. The content delivery plan typically involved:

First, setting up educational accounts for students to follow, with 9 out of 10 respondents in one study confirming they followed accounts specifically focused on vocabulary learning materials.

Subsequently, creating reels containing tutoring videos, language learning tips, and vocabulary demonstrations with visual contexts, was strengthened by posting consistently and monitoring content engagement to refine subsequent videos.

Overall, this methodical approach provided a structured framework for evaluating how social media shorts influence vocabulary acquisition, laying the groundwork for statistical analysis of learning outcomes.

Results from Instagram Reels-Based Learning

Empirical data strongly supports the effectiveness of Instagram Reels for language acquisition. Multiple studies demonstrate measurable improvements in vocabulary retention and usage among students exposed to this innovative learning method.

Pre-test vs. post-test score comparison

Experimental results consistently reveal substantial score improvements after Instagram Reels interventions. One comprehensive study found that students' lexical achievement increased from a pre-test average of 61.92 to an impressive 88.46 in the post-test—a substantial 26.54-point improvement. Likewise, another investigation documented an average increase from 7.15 to 9.35 points after implementing Instagram-based learning.

First, it's worth noting that initial research findings documented post-test averages reaching “good category” with scores of 86.33. Moreover, research involving high school students reported post-intervention scores climbing to 82, up from a pre-test average of 62.6. This pattern of improvement appeared across diverse educational settings, indicating the approach's versatility.

T-test significance and confidence interval

Statistical analysis confirms these improvements are not coincidental. T-test results consistently demonstrate significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores. Indeed, one study reported a t-test value of 8.379, which exceeded the t-table value of 2.035, clearly rejecting the null hypothesis.

Further analysis revealed confidence intervals that strengthen these conclusions. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranged from -3.067 to -1.333, never including zero. This statistically validates that score increases were genuinely attributable to the Instagram Reels intervention rather than random chance.

Another investigation reported a significance value (2-tailed) of less than 0.001, well below the 0.05 significance threshold. The negative sign on the mean difference (-2.200) confirmed that post-test scores consistently surpassed pre-test results.

N-gain score interpretation: 58.72% effectiveness

The normalized gain (N-gain) score serves as a standardized measure of educational effectiveness. Studies evaluating Instagram Reels for vocabulary learning reported an N-gain score of 58.72%. Educational researchers categorize this level as “quite effective,” positioning Instagram Reels as a validated tool for language acquisition.

This effectiveness rating aligns with other metrics from related research. For instance, the impact of Instagram on vocabulary acquisition reached a “Very High” classification with a mean score of 76.7% among university students. Similarly, experimental groups using Instagram for language learning saw their achievement scores raise from 61.6 to 78.3, whereas control groups showed minimal improvement.

Ultimately, these quantitative results demonstrate Instagram Reels' capacity to significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition through engaging short-form video content.

Student Engagement and Learning Behavior

Beyond statistical measures, the true impact of Instagram Reels on language acquisition manifests through profound changes in student behavior and engagement patterns. These behavioral shifts reveal why short-form videos create such effective learning environments.

Increased motivation through visual storytelling

Digital storytelling through Instagram Reels tremendously boosts student motivation. Studies demonstrate that learners using digital storytelling report pivotal increases in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors. This heightened engagement stems from the multimedia elements that make language learning enjoyable rather than tedious.

Research confirms that students utilizing digital storytelling express increased satisfaction, effective engagement, and enjoyment. Many previously disinterested learners report dramatic attitude shifts, with one student noting: "I learnt English in a fun way, even though I had hated it previously".

The appeal stems from several factors:

- Visual elements that create stronger mental connections
- Narrative techniques that contextualize vocabulary
- Creative freedom that promotes ownership of learning

Peer interaction via comments and shares

Social media inherently fosters peer collaboration, creating community-based learning environments. Research indicates that peer-led problem-solving via social media significantly enhances student engagement. Initially hesitant students often become active participants as they observe peers interacting.

The comment sections become informal learning spaces where learners receive instant feedback, ask questions, and build confidence. Studies show this real-time interaction builds a sense of community, reducing feelings of isolation often experienced in traditional learning models.

Interestingly, many students report feeling more comfortable seeking help from peers rather than instructors. This shift promotes autonomous learning while maintaining supportive structures—a balance difficult to achieve in conventional classrooms.

Reduced technostress and improved focus

Contrary to concerns about technology-induced stress, properly implemented Instagram Reels activities actually decrease technostress among language learners ^[6]. The short duration and focused nature of Reels help students maintain attention without feeling overwhelmed.

Students participating in Instagram-based vocabulary learning reported “less techno stress after treatment”. Predominantly, this occurs because the bite-sized format aligns with how today's learners naturally consume content, creating what researchers term a “Goldilocks Effect”—not too little stimulation, not too much.

Supportive learning environments further reduce anxiety levels. Comments from learners highlight this benefit: “It was good to have attentiveness and support throughout the lesson” Hence, the combination of appropriate content length and community support creates ideal conditions for focused language acquisition.

Conclusion

Social media shorts have demonstrated remarkable efficacy for language acquisition, significantly outperforming traditional vocabulary teaching methods. The experimental data clearly shows Instagram Reels' impact, with pre-test to post-test improvements averaging 26.54 points and an impressive 58.72% effectiveness rate based on N-gain score interpretation. This success addresses long-standing challenges in vocabulary retention that flashcards and textbook exercises have failed to resolve.

Short-form videos work because they align perfectly with how our brains process information. The bite-sized format reduces cognitive load while simultaneously providing rich contextual learning through visual storytelling. Additionally, interactive elements like captions, hashtags, and audio create stronger mental associations than isolated word lists, helping learners recall vocabulary when they actually need it.

Student behavior changes tell an equally compelling story. Learners using Instagram Reels report higher motivation levels and decreased technostress compared to traditional methods. The combination of peer interaction through comments, visual engagement, and manageable content length creates what researchers call the “Goldilocks Effect” - not too little stimulation, not too much.

Language educators should therefore consider Instagram Reels as a valuable supplement to existing teaching strategies. Though certainly not a replacement for comprehensive language education, these social media shorts offer a powerful tool for vocabulary acquisition that connects with today's visually-oriented learners. The fusion of entertainment with education – “edutainment” - represents a significant advancement in making language learning both effective and enjoyable.

This research ultimately points toward a future where language acquisition becomes less about memorization and more about meaningful engagement. As digital platforms continue evolving, educators who embrace these tools will likely see students develop stronger vocabulary retention and real-world language application skills. The days of struggling to recall crucial words might finally be behind us, thanks to the innovative application of social media shorts in language education.

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