

# From Watching to Speaking? Indonesian EFL Students' Engagement with English Role-play Content on Instagram Reels

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**Abstract:** Speaking remains a persistent challenge for Indonesian EFL learners, partly because classroom instruction often provides limited opportunities for meaningful oral practice. At the same time, students' frequent engagement with short-form social media videos, particularly Instagram Reels, offers potential exposure to authentic, contextualized spoken English. This study investigated students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels and its perceived contribution to EFL speaking learning. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from 32 eleventh-grade students in a bilingual class at a public senior high school through closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to identify patterns in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement, as well as perceived speaking-related benefits and challenges. The findings revealed that students demonstrated strong emotional engagement, reflected in enjoyment, interest, and reduced learning pressure, and high cognitive engagement, shown through efforts to understand, remember, and notice vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, and contextual language use. Behavioral engagement was mainly reflected in frequent viewing and imitation, while direct interaction and original content creation remained limited due to low confidence and fear of public judgment. Students perceived English roleplay Reels as helpful for improving pronunciation, vocabulary exposure, fluency awareness, tone, expression, and comfort in speaking English. However, distraction from entertainment content, time management issues, technical constraints, and limited confidence in producing videos constrained its pedagogical value. These findings suggest that Instagram Reels can serve as a supplementary speaking resource when integrated with guided imitation, structured speaking tasks, feedback, and confidence-building activities.

**Keywords:** Instagram Reels, roleplay content, student engagement, EFL speaking, digital learning.

## 1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the most essential yet challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, respond spontaneously, and participate in real-time communication. In academic, professional, and intercultural contexts, speaking proficiency enables learners not only to demonstrate linguistic knowledge but also to engage actively in social interaction and knowledge exchange (Baker, 2015; Lee & Drajati, 2019; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2020). In Indonesian EFL classrooms, however, developing speaking proficiency remains a persistent challenge because learners often have limited access to meaningful oral practice both inside and outside formal instruction (Nikmah & Anwar, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2020; Sidik et al., 2021). Classroom-based

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speaking instruction is frequently constrained by limited instructional time, large or mixed-level classes, exam-oriented learning, and continued emphasis on grammar and written accuracy, leaving students with insufficient opportunities to use English communicatively (Chou, 2021; Dong et al., 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2024; Mai et al., 2024). These structural constraints are further intensified by affective barriers such as speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and concern about negative evaluation, which often reduce learners' willingness to speak and contribute to silence or avoidance in EFL classrooms (Abrar et al., 2024; Bensalem, 2021; Mustamir, 2024; Teimouri et al., 2019). These conditions indicate the need for supplementary, low-pressure learning environments that can broaden students' exposure to spoken English and support speaking-oriented learning beyond classroom limitations.

The increasing integration of digital technologies into language learning has opened new possibilities for addressing these limitations. Mobile-assisted language learning allows students to access English input flexibly, repeatedly, and independently through personal devices, while online informal language learning provides opportunities for learners to encounter English outside teacher-directed instruction (Kacetyl & Klímová, 2019; Lai & Zheng, 2017; Sung et al., 2015). Recent research on informal digital learning of English shows that social media platforms can function as everyday learning ecologies where learners access authentic or semi-authentic input, observe language use, and engage with English through personally meaningful digital practices (Guo & Lee, 2023; Inayati et al., 2024; Ismail & Shafie, 2019). Among these platforms, Instagram has attracted growing attention in EFL research because it offers visually rich, multimodal, and familiar content that can increase learner motivation, sustain engagement, and expose students to contextualized English input (Aloraini, 2018; Rasyiid et al., 2021). Instagram Reels, in particular, provides short-form audiovisual content that is concise, repeatable, and easily accessible, making it potentially useful for speaking learning because students can observe pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions, gesture, tone, and situational language use in brief but meaningful communicative contexts (Aslan & Sirojtidinovna, 2025; Chadafi & Khasanah, 2024; Dewi et al., 2022; Prayoga et al., 2024).

English roleplay content on Instagram Reels is especially relevant to EFL speaking learning because it presents spoken language in simulated everyday interactions. Unlike decontextualized vocabulary lists or grammar explanations, roleplay videos show how language is used for specific communicative purposes, including initiating conversations, responding appropriately, expressing emotions, managing turns, and adjusting tone according to context. This type of roleplay-based audiovisual input may support learners' noticing of form-meaning relationships and pragmatic use before they attempt to produce similar expressions in their own speech. Research on audiovisual input has shown that video-based exposure can facilitate comprehension, vocabulary learning, noticing, and retention, particularly when learners are supported by contextual cues, subtitles, repetition, and multimodal information (Lo, 2024; Pérez, 2020; Pérez, 2022; Peters & Webb, 2018; Sydorenko et al., 2024). In speaking learning, repeated exposure and imitation are also valuable because learners can rehearse pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and formulaic expressions in a less threatening environment before using them in communicative tasks (Etikasari et al., 2022; Hamad et al., 2019). Therefore, roleplay Reels may help bridge the gap between spoken input and speaking practice by allowing learners to observe, repeat, and internalize language patterns in low-pressure, learner-controlled conditions.

Previous studies have reported positive contributions of Instagram and short-form video content to EFL learning, particularly regarding motivation, exposure, pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking development. Aloraini (2018) found that Instagram can function as a supplementary EFL learning tool by promoting learner engagement and language output. Dewi et al. (2022) reported that Instagram Reels provides authentic and motivating materials that can support speaking skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and cultural awareness. Similarly, Chadafi and Khasanah (2024) found that Instagram Reels had a positive effect on students' English speaking performance, while Prayoga et al. (2024) showed that English-speaking content on Instagram contributed to students' speaking skill development. Recent research by Aslan and Sirojtidinovna (2025) further suggests that short-form teacher-generated Reels can attract learners'

attention and support vocabulary learning when the content is engaging, relatable, and culturally meaningful. These studies indicate that Instagram Reels has pedagogical potential as a supplementary medium for EFL learning. However, they also suggest that the effectiveness of Reels depends on how learners engage with the content, not merely on the platform's availability.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the literature. First, many previous studies have examined Instagram or Instagram Reels mainly in terms of general perceptions, motivation, or speaking outcomes. At the same time, less attention has been given to the engagement processes through which students interact with specific types of speaking-related content. Second, research has not sufficiently examined students' engagement with English roleplay Reels as a distinct form of short-form audiovisual input that combines dialogue, situational context, expression, gesture, and pragmatic language use. Third, students' engagement with such content needs to be understood in multidimensional terms. Emotional engagement is important because enjoyment, comfort, and reduced anxiety may encourage students to continue accessing English input; cognitive engagement is important because students need to notice, understand, remember, and process linguistic and pragmatic features from the videos; and behavioral engagement is important because speaking development requires learners to move beyond watching toward imitation, practice, interaction, or production. Without examining these dimensions, it remains unclear whether students' use of English roleplay Reels constitutes meaningful, speaking-oriented learning or merely passive entertainment. Furthermore, the educational value of Instagram Reels must be weighed against its challenges, including distractions from non-educational content, time management issues, technical constraints, low confidence, and reluctance to create original spoken content.

To address these gaps, the present study offers a learner-centered, process-oriented investigation of students' engagement with English role-play content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning. Its novelty lies in examining engagement not simply as platform use or general interest, but as a multidimensional construct involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral participation. This approach allows the study to explain how students enjoy, process, imitate, and respond to English roleplay Reels, and why some forms of engagement, such as direct interaction and content creation, may remain limited. Unlike studies that focus primarily on whether Instagram improves speaking performance, this study explores how students perceive the contribution of roleplay Reels to pronunciation, vocabulary exposure, fluency awareness, tone, expression, and speaking comfort. It also identifies the challenges that may reduce the pedagogical value of Reels if students are not guided toward more active speaking practice. By focusing specifically on English roleplay content, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how informal digital media can support speaking-oriented EFL learning beyond the classroom.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning. Specifically, it investigates students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement with roleplay videos, their perceived speaking-related benefits, and the challenges they encounter when using Instagram Reels as a supplementary speaking resource. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do students emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engage with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning? (2) What perceived contributions do English roleplay Reels make to students' speaking learning? Moreover, (3) What challenges do students experience when engaging with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels for speaking learning?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to provide a detailed, low-inference description of students' experiences, perceptions, engagement patterns, perceived speaking-related benefits, and challenges within a naturally

occurring digital learning context. Rather than testing the causal effect of Instagram Reels on speaking performance, the study focused on how students emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged with English roleplay content and how they perceived its contribution to speaking learning. A qualitative descriptive approach is suitable for educational studies that seek to explore participants' views and experiences in accessible, context-sensitive, and practically relevant ways (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In this study, closed-ended questionnaire items were used to summarize patterns of engagement, perceived benefits, and challenges. In contrast, open-ended responses were used to obtain richer explanations of students' experiences. The integration of the two response formats enabled the study to capture general response tendencies and more nuanced student perspectives.

## *2.2 Participants and Research Context*

The participants were 32 eleventh-grade students from a bilingual class at a public senior high school. They were selected through purposive sampling because they had prior experience with English learning activities and were familiar with Instagram as a social media platform. This sampling strategy was appropriate because the study required participants who could meaningfully reflect on their engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels. All participants had received formal English instruction and had sufficient familiarity with Instagram Reels to respond to the questionnaire items and open-ended prompts. The bilingual class context was also relevant to the study because students were expected to have regular exposure to English learning while still facing challenges in developing speaking confidence and oral fluency. Thus, the participants provided a suitable context for examining how informal digital content may support speaking-oriented EFL learning beyond classroom instruction. The original manuscript identifies these participants as 32 eleventh-grade students from a bilingual class at a public senior high school.

## *2.3 Research Instruments*

Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items and open-ended prompts. The closed-ended items were designed to identify students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels, as well as their perceived speaking-related benefits and challenges. The items used Likert-type response options to obtain comparable patterns of agreement across participants. Likert-type items are useful for summarizing participants' levels of agreement and identifying response distributions in educational survey research (Alwin et al., 2018). The open-ended prompts were included to allow students to explain their experiences in their own words and provide deeper insights into how they used, interpreted, and responded to English roleplay Reels. This combination was useful because closed-ended items provided descriptive patterns, while open-ended responses supplied contextual explanations that clarified the meaning behind the numerical trends (Singer & Couper, 2017; Schonlau & Couper, 2015).

The questionnaire was organized around five main areas: students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement; perceived effects on speaking learning; and challenges in using Instagram Reels. Emotional engagement encompassed students' enjoyment, interest, comfort, and motivation while watching English role-play videos. Cognitive engagement focused on students' efforts to understand, remember, and notice vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, tone, and contextual language use. Behavioral engagement was examined through students' viewing frequency, imitation practices, interaction with content, and willingness to create their own role-play videos. The perceived-benefit items explored students' views on pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, tone, expression, and speaking comfort. The challenge items addressed distraction, time management, internet or device limitations, and confidence-related barriers.

## *2.4 Validity and Trustworthiness*

To ensure the instrument's quality, content, and face validity, procedures were conducted before data collection. The questionnaire items were reviewed to assess whether they represented the intended constructs of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement, as well as perceived speaking-related

benefits and challenges. The review also focused on the clarity, readability, relevance, and appropriateness of the items for eleventh-grade EFL students. This step was important because students needed to understand the items clearly and respond based on their actual experiences with Instagram Reels. Minor revisions were made to improve wording, avoid ambiguity, and ensure that the items were suitable for the participants' language level and learning context.

Trustworthiness was also strengthened during data analysis. The open-ended responses were examined carefully through repeated reading and systematic coding to ensure that the themes reflected participants' actual responses rather than the researcher's assumptions. Coding decisions were reviewed and refined iteratively to maintain consistency across themes. The integration of closed-ended and open-ended data further supported the study's trustworthiness, as the qualitative responses helped explain and contextualize the descriptive patterns identified in the closed-ended items. Such integration is useful for producing more credible interpretations in studies that combine structured survey responses with open-ended qualitative data (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2017; Harrison et al., 2020).

### *2.5 Data Collection Procedures*

Data were collected via a questionnaire administered to 32 participants. Before completing the questionnaire, students were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. They were asked to respond honestly based on their experiences of watching or engaging with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels. The closed-ended items enabled students to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to engagement, perceived benefits, and challenges. The open-ended prompts allowed them to describe their experiences more freely, including how they felt when watching roleplay Reels, what language features they noticed, how they practiced speaking, and what difficulties they encountered.

Because the study focused on students' engagement with informal digital content, the questionnaire was designed to capture experiences that occurred both inside and outside the classroom. This procedure allowed the study to examine Instagram Reels not as a formal instructional intervention, but as a supplementary digital resource that students encountered in their everyday social media use.

### *2.6 Data Analysis*

Data analysis followed a mixed-format analytic strategy. The closed-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement, as well as their perceived speaking-related benefits and challenges. This analysis allowed the researcher to determine which forms of engagement were more prominent and which challenges were most commonly reported. Descriptive statistics were appropriate because the study did not aim to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships, but to summarize students' response patterns in relation to their engagement with English roleplay Reels.

The open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved repeated familiarization with students' responses, coding meaningful units of text, grouping related codes, and developing themes that represented recurring patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is appropriate for identifying patterned meanings across qualitative data and for interpreting participants' experiences in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, the themes were developed around students' enjoyment and comfort, language awareness, imitation practices, perceived improvement in speaking, confidence barriers, distractions, time management, and technical constraints. The quantitative summaries and qualitative themes were then compared and integrated to produce a more complete interpretation of students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Emotional Engagement with English Roleplay Content on Instagram Reels

The first research question examined how students emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning. The findings show that students demonstrated strong emotional engagement, particularly in enjoyment, interest, and perceived comfort with learning. As shown in Table 1, most students responded positively to learning English through roleplay videos. A total of 46.9% of students strongly agreed, and 40.6% agreed that they felt excited when learning English through roleplay content on Instagram Reels. Similarly, 40.6% strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed that the characters and situations in the videos attracted their interest. These responses indicate that English roleplay Reels created an enjoyable and engaging learning experience for most students. The strongest response was among students' perceptions that role-play content was beneficial for their English-speaking development, with 50.0% strongly agreeing and 34.4% agreeing. However, students' sense of belonging to an English learning community through Instagram Reels was weaker than other emotional indicators, with 40.6% selecting neutral responses, 21.9% strongly agreeing, and 25.0% agreeing. This suggests that emotional engagement was largely individual rather than community-based.

**Table 1.** Students' Emotional Engagement with English Roleplay Reels

Indicator	Dominant Response Pattern	Interpretation
Feeling excited when learning through roleplay videos	46.9% strongly agreed; 40.6% agreed	Very positive emotional response
Interest in characters and situations	40.6% strongly agreed; 37.5% agreed	High interest and relevance
Perceived benefit for speaking development	50.0% strongly agreed; 34.4% agreed	Strong perceived usefulness
Sense of belonging to an English learning community	40.6% neutral; 25.0% agreed; 21.9% strongly agreed	Moderate community-related engagement

The open-ended responses further support these quantitative patterns. Students described English roleplay Reels as enjoyable, familiar, and less intimidating than formal classroom speaking activities. One student stated, *"I feel happy watching the roleplay videos because it feels like entertainment, not studying."* Another student explained, *"The videos are fun and relatable, so I do not feel pressure when learning English."* These responses suggest that Instagram Reels helped create a low-pressure emotional environment in which students could engage with English more comfortably. The findings indicate that roleplay content attracted students not only because it was accessible and entertaining, but also because it reduced the psychological pressure often associated with speaking English in formal learning contexts.

#### 3.2 Cognitive Engagement and Language Awareness

The findings also reveal strong cognitive engagement. Students did not merely watch English role-play videos for entertainment; they also attempted to understand, remember, and process the language used in them. As shown in Table 2, 43.8% of students strongly agreed, and 34.4% agreed that they felt motivated to improve their speaking skills after watching English roleplay Reels. Persistence in understanding difficult content was also high, with 53.1% strongly agreeing and 28.1% agreeing that they tried to understand roleplay videos even when the language was challenging. In addition, 43.8% strongly agreed, and 34.4% agreed that they tried to remember words or phrases from the videos. However, the use of these expressions in actual conversations was less consistent: 34.4% agreed, and 28.1% strongly agreed that they reused phrases from the videos, while 28.1% selected neutral responses. This pattern suggests that students were cognitively active in noticing and remembering language, but the transfer from input to spoken output was still developing.

**Table 2.** Students' Cognitive Engagement with English Roleplay Reels

Indicator	Dominant Response Pattern	Interpretation
Motivation to improve speaking after watching roleplay videos	43.8% strongly agreed; 34.4% agreed	High motivational-cognitive engagement
Effort to understand challenging content	53.1% strongly agreed; 28.1% agreed	Strong persistence in comprehension
Effort to remember words or phrases	43.8% strongly agreed; 34.4% agreed	Strong noticing and retention effort
Reusing phrases in real conversations	34.4% agreed; 28.1% strongly agreed; 28.1% neutral	Moderate transfer into spoken use

Students' open-ended responses clarify how they processed the language in the videos. One student stated, "I try to remember the words they use because I want to use them later." Another explained, "*The subtitles help me understand what the characters are saying, so I can follow the meaning.*" Some students also became more aware of the pragmatic and contextual use of English. As one participant noted, "*I learn how to say something in the right situation, not just the meaning of the words.*" These responses show that English roleplay Reels supported students' attention to vocabulary, pronunciation, meaning, and situational appropriateness. Thus, cognitive engagement was reflected not only in understanding content but also in noticing how spoken English functions in communicative contexts.

### 3.3 Behavioral Engagement and Speaking Practice

Students' behavioral engagement showed a more varied pattern than their emotional and cognitive engagement. The findings indicate that students frequently watched English role-play Reels and often imitated the language used in them. However, more active forms of participation, such as commenting, interacting, or creating original English roleplay content, remained limited. As shown in Table 3, 46.9% of students agreed, and 31.3% strongly agreed that they frequently watched English roleplay content on Instagram Reels. Regarding imitation, 40.6% agreed, and 25.0% strongly agreed that they practiced speaking by imitating the videos. However, students were less likely to engage interactively with the content, and content creation was particularly low. In the original data, 68.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they created their own English role-play videos. This suggests that students' behavioral engagement was mainly receptive and imitative rather than productive or participatory.

**Table 3.** Students' Behavioral Engagement with English Roleplay Reels

Indicator	Dominant Response Pattern	Interpretation
Frequently watching English roleplay content	46.9% agreed; 31.3% strongly agreed	High viewing behavior
Imitating roleplay videos for speaking practice	40.6% agreed; 25.0% strongly agreed	Moderate to high imitation practice
Interacting with content through likes or comments	Limited interaction reported	Low social participation
Creating original English roleplay videos	68.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed	Very limited productive engagement

The open-ended responses explain why behavioral engagement did not fully develop into content production. Many students viewed imitation as a safe and manageable form of speaking practice. One participant stated, "*I repeat what the characters say to practice pronunciation.*" Another student explained, "*I like copying the dialogue because I can practice without feeling nervous.*" These responses indicate that

imitation allowed students to rehearse spoken English privately and reduce performance pressure. However, students expressed hesitation about producing and uploading their own videos. One student stated, “*I am not confident enough to make my own video,*” while another explained, “*I am afraid people will judge my English if I upload a video.*” These findings suggest that while Instagram Reels encouraged low-risk exposure and imitation, students still experienced anxiety and fear of evaluation when speaking became public and visible.

### 3.4 Perceived Contributions to Speaking Learning

The second research question focused on students’ perceived contributions of English roleplay Reels to speaking learning. The findings show that students generally perceived roleplay content as beneficial for several aspects of speaking, particularly pronunciation, vocabulary exposure, tone, expression, fluency awareness, and speaking comfort. As shown in Table 4, 37.5% of students agreed, and 28.1% strongly agreed that English roleplay videos helped improve their speaking fluency. Students reported stronger agreement regarding their understanding of emotional expression and tone in spoken English, with 50.0% agreeing and 28.1% strongly agreeing. Learning enjoyment was especially high, with 50.0% agreeing and 43.8% strongly agreeing that roleplay content made learning English more enjoyable. However, improvement in speaking confidence was more cautious, as 59.4% of students selected neutral responses. This indicates that while students perceived roleplay Reels as useful for exposure and awareness, increased confidence in actual speaking may require additional guided practice.

Table 4. Perceived Contributions of English Roleplay Reels to Speaking Learning

Aspect	Dominant Response Pattern	Interpretation
Speaking fluency	37.5% agreed; 28.1% strongly agreed	Positive perceived contribution
Understanding tone and emotional expression	50.0% agreed; 28.1% strongly agreed	Strong perceived contribution
Enjoyment in learning English	50.0% agreed; 43.8% strongly agreed	Very strong, effective contribution
Speaking confidence	59.4% neutral	Confidence improvement remains limited

Students’ responses provide further insight into these perceived benefits. One participant stated, “*I think my pronunciation is better after watching many roleplay videos.*” Another student explained, “*I understand better how to express emotions when speaking English.*” Some students emphasized gradual improvement rather than immediate confidence. For example, one participant said, “*I feel more comfortable speaking, but I am still not fully confident.*” These responses suggest that students perceived English roleplay Reels as useful for developing speaking-related awareness and comfort, but not necessarily sufficient for building full speaking confidence. The findings, therefore, indicate that Instagram Reels may support the early stages of speaking development by increasing exposure, modeling pronunciation and expression, and encouraging imitation, but students still need structured opportunities to translate this exposure into active oral production.

### 3.5 Challenges in Using Instagram Reels for Speaking Learning

The third research question examined the challenges students encountered when engaging with English role-play content on Instagram Reels for speaking practice. The findings show that students faced several challenges, including distraction from non-educational content, time management difficulties, technical constraints, and limited confidence in producing original content. As shown in Table 5, distraction was a prominent issue, with 25.0% of students agreeing and 21.9% strongly agreeing that irrelevant content distracted them while using Instagram Reels. Time management was also affected, with 37.5% agreeing and 3.1% strongly agreeing that Instagram Reels disrupted their study organization. Technical constraints were

also reported, with 37.5% agreeing and 12.5% strongly agreeing that internet or device limitations interfered with learning. In addition, the low level of content creation reported in the behavioral engagement data indicates that confidence-related barriers remained a major challenge.

**Table 5.** Challenges in Using Instagram Reels for Speaking Learning

Challenge	Dominant Response Pattern	Interpretation
Distraction from irrelevant content	25.0% agreed; 21.9% strongly agreed	Moderate to high distraction
Time management difficulties	37.5% agreed; 3.1% strongly agreed	Moderate disruption
Internet or device limitations	37.5% agreed; 12.5% strongly agreed	Moderate technical constraints
Low confidence in creating videos	Reflected in 68.8% disagreement/strong disagreement with content creation	Major barrier to productive engagement

The open-ended responses illustrate how these challenges affected students' learning experiences. One student stated, "*Sometimes I want to learn, but I get distracted by other videos.*" Another participant explained, "I lose track of time because I keep scrolling." Technical limitations were also mentioned, as one student noted, "*The internet connection is sometimes slow, so I cannot watch the videos properly.*" These findings show that while Instagram Reels provides accessible and engaging English input, its entertainment-based design may also disrupt learning focus. In addition, students' reluctance to create original roleplay content suggests that confidence and fear of public judgment remain important barriers to active speaking practice. Therefore, Instagram Reels may be pedagogically useful as a supplementary resource for speaking. Still, its use needs to be guided to ensure students remain focused, manage their time effectively, and gradually move from viewing and imitation toward more active speaking production. The findings show that students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels was strongest in emotional and cognitive dimensions. In contrast, behavioral engagement was more limited and mainly reflected in watching and imitation. Students perceived roleplay Reels as useful for pronunciation, vocabulary exposure, tone, expression, fluency awareness, and speaking comfort. However, challenges related to distraction, time management, technical access, and low confidence limited the extent to which Instagram Reels could support more active and productive speaking and learning.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that English roleplay content on Instagram Reels can support EFL speaking learning primarily by fostering students' emotional and cognitive engagement. Students reported high levels of excitement, interest, enjoyment, and perceived usefulness when engaging with roleplay-based Reels. This suggests that short-form roleplay videos may create a low-pressure learning environment that makes spoken English feel more accessible and less intimidating. This is important in the Indonesian EFL context, where speaking practice is often limited by classroom constraints, exam-oriented instruction, and affective barriers such as anxiety, fear of mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation. The finding is consistent with studies showing that speaking anxiety and fear of public judgment can reduce students' oral participation and willingness to communicate (Teimouri et al., 2019; Bensalem, 2021; Abrar et al., 2024; Mustamir, 2024). In this study, students' enjoyment of roleplay Reels appeared to reduce the sense of pressure commonly associated with formal speaking activities. Rather than encountering English only through teacher-directed classroom tasks, students engaged with spoken English in a familiar digital environment that they associated with entertainment, relatability, and personal choice. This indicates that informal digital media may provide an effectively supportive entry point for speaking-oriented learning.

The strong emotional engagement found in this study also suggests that enjoyment should not be viewed as a superficial aspect of social media-based learning. In EFL speaking development, emotional comfort can

influence whether learners continue exposing themselves to English, imitate spoken models, and gradually build readiness for oral production. Students in this study described roleplay Reels as “fun,” “relatable,” and less stressful than formal learning, indicating that emotional engagement functioned as a motivational condition for sustained exposure. This finding supports previous research emphasizing the role of foreign-language enjoyment in strengthening learners’ willingness to engage with English and in reducing the negative impact of anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2017; Bensalem, 2021). However, students’ sense of belonging to an English learning community remained relatively moderate. This suggests that their engagement with Instagram Reels was largely individual and content-based rather than socially interactive. In other words, students enjoyed and learned from the videos, but they did not necessarily experience Instagram Reels as a collaborative English learning community. This finding aligns with research on online informal language learning, which indicates that social media often functions as a space for personal exposure and content consumption unless interaction is intentionally structured through pedagogical tasks or community-based activities (Guo & Lee, 2023; Inayati et al., 2024; Ismail & Shafie, 2019).

Cognitive engagement was another major strength of students’ interaction with English roleplay Reels. The findings show that students tried to understand the language used in the videos, remember words and phrases, pay attention to pronunciation, and notice how expressions were used in particular situations. This indicates that roleplay content encouraged students to process language meaningfully rather than merely consume entertainment. The presence of dialogue, subtitles, gestures, facial expressions, and situational context may have helped students connect linguistic forms with communicative functions. This supports research on audiovisual input showing that videos can facilitate comprehension, noticing, vocabulary learning, and retention when learners are supported by multimodal cues, repetition, and on-screen text (Pérez, 2020; Pérez, 2022; Lo, 2024; Sydorenko et al., 2024). Roleplay Reels are particularly useful because they demonstrate language use in simulated interactional contexts. Students are exposed not only to what expressions mean, but also to how they are pronounced, when they are used, what tone accompanies them, and how speakers respond to one another. This contextualized exposure is important for speaking learning because oral communication requires pragmatic awareness, pronunciation control, and interactional sensitivity, not only vocabulary knowledge.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal a gap between cognitive engagement and actual spoken production. Although many students tried to remember words or phrases from the videos, fewer reported consistently reusing them in real conversations. This suggests that exposure and noticing are necessary but insufficient for the development of speaking. Learners may understand and remember useful expressions, yet still require guided opportunities to transform input into output. This interpretation is consistent with interactionist perspectives on instructed second language acquisition, which emphasize that meaningful input must be complemented by opportunities for output, feedback, and the negotiation of meaning (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2020). In the present study, Instagram Reels appeared to support the input and rehearsal stages of speaking learning, especially through repeated viewing and imitation. However, without structured speaking tasks, students may remain at the level of comprehension and private practice rather than progressing toward spontaneous oral use. Therefore, roleplay Reels should be understood as a supplementary resource that prepares learners for speaking, not as a complete substitute for classroom-based speaking interaction.

Behavioral engagement showed a more uneven pattern. Students frequently watched English roleplay Reels and many practiced by imitating the characters’ dialogue, pronunciation, and expressions. This finding suggests that imitation can serve as a manageable, low-risk form of speaking practice. For learners who feel anxious about speaking publicly, repeating expressions privately may help them rehearse pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and formulaic language before using English in more communicative contexts. Previous studies have similarly shown that modeled input, repetition, and imitation can support speaking fluency and pronunciation development, particularly when learners can practice in low-pressure conditions (Hamad et al., 2019; Etikasari et al., 2022). However, students’ behavioral engagement was mostly receptive and

imitative. More active forms of engagement, such as commenting, interacting with content creators, or producing original English roleplay videos, remained limited. This finding is important because it shows that students' familiarity with social media does not automatically translate into active language production. They may be comfortable watching and imitating, but still reluctant to make their speaking visible to others.

The limited creation of original roleplay videos reflects persistent confidence-related barriers. Many students reported that they were not confident enough to upload English videos and feared that others would judge their English. This finding reinforces previous research showing that fear of negative evaluation remains a powerful obstacle in EFL speaking contexts, even when learning occurs through digital platforms (Nguyen, 2020; Mai et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2024). Instagram Reels may reduce anxiety at the level of exposure because students can watch privately and repeatedly, but it does not automatically remove the anxiety associated with public performance. In fact, the visibility of social media may intensify learners' concerns about making mistakes because their spoken output can be viewed, replayed, or judged by peers. This finding highlights a central tension in social media-based speaking learning: the platform provides authentic audiences and opportunities for production, but those same features may discourage students who lack confidence. Therefore, pedagogical guidance is needed to help learners gradually move from private imitation to semi-private rehearsal, peer-supported practice, and eventually to more public forms of speaking production.

Students' perceived speaking-related benefits further confirm the potential of English roleplay Reels as a supplementary resource for speaking. Students reported that the videos helped them improve pronunciation, expand vocabulary exposure, understand tone and emotional expression, develop fluency awareness, and feel more comfortable with spoken English. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that Instagram Reels and English-speaking content on social media can support speaking development, pronunciation awareness, vocabulary learning, and learner motivation (Dewi et al., 2022; Chadafi & Khasanah, 2024; Prayoga et al., 2024; Aslan & Sirojtdinovna, 2025). The strongest perceived contribution appeared in enjoyment and understanding tone or expression, suggesting that roleplay content is especially valuable for exposing students to the expressive and pragmatic dimensions of speaking. This is a key advantage of roleplay Reels over more traditional language-learning materials. While textbooks may present expressions in written form, short roleplay videos show how expressions are delivered through voice, emotion, gesture, timing, and social context.

However, students' improvement in speaking confidence was more cautious, as many students selected neutral responses. This finding suggests that while Instagram Reels may increase comfort and awareness, confidence in speaking requires more than exposure. Speaking confidence develops through repeated successful performance, supportive feedback, and opportunities to use language interactively. Therefore, students may feel more familiar with English after watching roleplay videos, but they may not yet feel ready to speak independently or publicly. This distinction is crucial for interpreting the pedagogical value of Instagram Reels. The platform can provide accessible input and encourage imitation, but confidence-building requires structured instructional support. Teachers need to design activities that help students rehearse expressions from Reels, adapt them into new contexts, perform them in pairs or small groups, receive feedback, and gradually increase the complexity and visibility of their speaking tasks. Without this support, students may remain engaged viewers rather than active speakers.

The challenges identified in this study also reveal the dual nature of Instagram Reels as both a learning resource and a source of distraction. Students reported being distracted by irrelevant videos, losing track of time while scrolling, difficulty managing study time, and technical limitations such as unstable internet connections or device issues. These challenges are consistent with research on mobile-assisted and informal digital language learning, which shows that demands for self-regulation accompany flexibility and accessibility (Sung et al., 2015; Kaceti & Klímová, 2019; Lai & Zheng, 2017). Instagram Reels is not designed primarily as an educational platform; its algorithm encourages continuous scrolling and exposure to entertainment content. As a result, students may begin with the intention to learn English but quickly shift

to unrelated content. This finding indicates that the educational use of Reels requires clear learning goals, time boundaries, curated content, and teacher-guided tasks. Without such structure, the platform's entertainment affordances may weaken its learning potential.

The findings have several pedagogical implications. First, EFL teachers should not treat Instagram Reels as a stand-alone solution for learning to speak, but rather as a supplementary source of modeled spoken input. Teachers can curate appropriate English roleplay Reels and use them as triggers for classroom speaking activities. Second, instruction should help students progress through stages of engagement: watching for general meaning, noticing useful expressions, repeating and imitating pronunciation, practicing dialogues in pairs, modifying role-play scenarios, and finally producing their own short spoken performances. Third, teachers should reduce the social risk of content creation by beginning with private or small-group video recordings before asking students to share content more publicly. This gradual approach can help build confidence and reduce fear of judgment. Fourth, students need guidance in digital self-regulation. Teachers can provide learning checklists, viewing limits, reflection sheets, and specific speaking tasks so that students use Reels purposefully rather than passively scrolling. In this way, Instagram Reels can be transformed from an informal entertainment platform into a structured speaking-learning resource.

This study also has several limitations. First, the sample comprised 32 eleventh-grade students from a single bilingual class at a public senior high school, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader EFL populations. Second, the study relied mainly on questionnaire responses, including closed-ended and open-ended items. Hence, the findings reflect students' self-reported engagement and perceived speaking development rather than objectively measured improvements in speaking. Third, the study did not examine students' actual Instagram activity, video-viewing behavior, imitation frequency, or speaking performance before and after engaging with roleplay Reels. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of perceived patterns of contribution and engagement, not as proof of causal improvement in speaking proficiency. Fourth, because the study used a descriptive design, it did not compare guided and unguided use of Instagram Reels. Future studies should involve larger, more diverse samples; include speaking performance assessments; analyze students' actual digital engagement behavior; and use longitudinal or experimental designs to examine whether structured integration of roleplay Reels can improve pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary use, confidence, and spontaneous speaking performance.

Overall, this study shows that English roleplay content on Instagram Reels has meaningful potential for EFL speaking learning when understood as a supplementary, engagement-building resource. Its main value lies in providing enjoyable, contextualized, and repeatable exposure to spoken English that encourages students to notice, remember, and imitate useful language. However, the findings also show that watching and imitation do not automatically lead to active speaking production. To maximize the pedagogical value of Instagram Reels, teachers need to provide structured guidance, confidence-building activities, feedback, and opportunities for students to transform digital exposure into spoken interaction. Thus, the central issue is not whether Instagram Reels can support speaking learning, but how educators can design learning tasks that move students from scrolling and watching toward rehearsing, interacting, and speaking with greater confidence.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined students' engagement with English roleplay content on Instagram Reels in EFL speaking learning, focusing on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement, perceived speaking-related contributions, and learning challenges. The findings show that English roleplay Reels can serve as a meaningful supplementary resource for learning to speak by providing enjoyable, contextualized, and low-pressure exposure to spoken English. Students demonstrated strong emotional engagement through enjoyment and interest. They reduced learning pressure and fostered strong cognitive engagement by focusing on understanding, remembering, and noticing vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, tone, and contextual language use. However, behavioral engagement was more limited, mainly reflected in frequent

viewing and imitation. At the same time, direct interaction and original content creation remained low due to low confidence and fear of public judgment. Students perceived roleplay Reels as helpful for improving pronunciation, vocabulary exposure, fluency awareness, emotional expression, and comfort in speaking English, but the findings also indicate that exposure alone is insufficient to develop active speaking production. Distractions from entertainment content, time-management difficulties, technical constraints, and low confidence further limited the pedagogical value of Instagram Reels. Therefore, Instagram Reels should not be treated as a replacement for classroom speaking instruction, but as a supplementary digital resource that requires pedagogical guidance. EFL teachers are encouraged to curate relevant roleplay Reels, integrate them with guided imitation, structured speaking tasks, peer practice, feedback, and confidence-building activities, and help students move gradually from passive viewing to active oral production. Future studies should involve larger, more diverse samples, include direct assessments of speaking performance, and examine the long-term impact of structured Instagram Reels-based activities on students' speaking development.

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## 7. Declaration of AI Use

During manuscript preparation, the authors used a GPT-based AI tool to assist with language polishing, sentence clarity, and academic style refinement. The tool was used solely as an editing aid to improve the manuscript's presentation. It did not contribute to the formulation of the research problem, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, or interpretation of the results. The authors retained full control over the content, critically reviewed all AI-assisted revisions, and took complete responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final form of the manuscript.

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