Self-Expression of Mechanical Engineering Students on Instagram Reels: English Self-Disclosure

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the self-disclosure practices of Mechanical Engineering students at Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya through their use of English on Instagram Reels. As digital natives, these students navigate identity construction in online spaces, using English as both a communicative tool and a form of emotional distancing. The research aims to understand how and why students disclose personal content in English and how this influences their language development, emotional expression, and digital identity. Employing a qualitative case study method, data were collected through observation of Instagram Reels content and in-depth interviews with selected participants. The findings reveal that students perceive English as more neutral and emotionally safer, enabling more open expression of thoughts, struggles, and achievements. Instagram Reels also serves as a platform for self-therapy, community building, and linguistic growth. This research contributes to the understanding of digital self-performance among vocational students in non-English majors and offers insights into the intersections of language use, self-expression, and media literacy in contemporary educational contexts.

Keywords: self-disclosure, vocational students, instagram reels

1. Introduction

Learning and communication are closely connected, as language serves as a primary means for individuals to convey ideas, exchange information, and interact in daily life. In the context of education, English especially as a foreign language has become an essential medium that supports the learning process, not only among students but also among educators from both English and non-English fields. However, for learners in environments where English is not commonly used, speaking the language remains a major challenge. This difficulty often stems from broader social and cultural differences that shape how first and foreign languages are acquired. These contextual factors contribute to students' low proficiency in English, particularly in countries where it is not the native language (Arianti, 2021).

English has become a dominant global language and plays a vital role in various aspects of modern life, from education to international communication. As the most widely used language for global interaction, English holds a central place in communication across cultures. Among its four main skills, speaking is often viewed as the most important for effective interpersonal exchange. It is categorized as a productive skill in foreign language learning, requiring not only an understanding of language structures but also the ability to generate and respond to spoken language in real-time. Harmer explains that speaking fluently means having knowledge of language features as well as the capacity to process both information and language spontaneously (Faiza et al., 2022).

In the present era, English is no longer regarded simply as a fashionable trend or an additional language to learn. Instead, it has firmly established itself as the most influential and widely used language across the globe. Its role has shifted from being optional to essential, becoming a crucial tool for accessing knowledge, participating in global communication, and engaging in international opportunities. This global importance is not limited to native English-speaking countries; it extends to almost every part of the world, including Indonesia. For many Indonesians, the ability to understand and use English is now considered a fundamental skill that supports academic success, career advancement, and meaningful interaction in an increasingly interconnected world (Shofiyuddin, 2016).

Today's university students represent a mix of generational groups, mainly Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995) and Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2014), while most university lecturers belong to the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964). These generational differences have led to distinct contrasts in learning styles, communication preferences, and educational expectations. Generation Z students, in particular, have been raised in a highly digital environment and are very familiar with using advanced technologies such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, and internet-based tools. As digital natives, they interact with information quickly and efficiently, which significantly influences how they learn. This shift demands that teaching methods in higher education evolve to meet the unique needs and characteristics of this generation (Erzad et al., 2020).

Given their technological fluency, Generation Z students have a significant advantage in developing foreign language skills, particularly English, which serves as the global language of communication in the modern era. They can access a wide range of digital resources to support their language learning such as videos, podcasts, online articles, apps, and interactive platforms which help them practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills more independently and flexibly. Despite these advantages, Generation Z students may still encounter challenges in mastering English, although the nature of these difficulties may differ from those faced by earlier generations. Understanding their specific learning preferences and digital habits is essential for educators to effectively support their language development (Erzad et al., 2020).

The millennial era is marked by rapid technological advancement, especially in the field of information technology. This development has led to the emergence of digital spaces known as cyberspace or the internet (Wahyuni & Komara, 2023). One of the most evident impacts is the growing integration of digital media into everyday life, particularly among university students.

Globalization and the rise of popular culture have further reinforced the role of technology in shaping modern lifestyles. In Indonesia, dependence on digital devices such as smartphones has increased significantly. Western cultural products such as films, music, fashion, social media, and TV shows—have deeply permeated students' daily routines. Within this context, Instagram has become one of the most frequently used platforms by young people (Putri & Tyas, 2025).

Mass media has also undergone a major transformation. It now functions not only as a source of information but also as a reference for shaping people's lifestyle choices. Unlike traditional media, today's digital media can be accessed instantly through smartphones with internet access, allowing users especially digital natives to obtain the information they need quickly and conveniently (Sari & Basit, 2020).

In the digital era, social media has become a daily companion. Without it, interaction and

information access would be limited. Social media provides more than just communication it serves as a platform where individuals can instantly and globally shape public perception and project their digital identity (Rumandang Bulan & Sumayah, 2025).

Instagram, in particular, has evolved beyond a simple photo-sharing app to become a lifestyle tool, especially among teenagers and college students. For today's youth, Instagram is a visual space where they express themselves and construct personal identities. With features that allow users to capture, edit, and share photos, Instagram facilitates meaningful interactions and the presentation of one's ideal self-image (Gradianto & Andiansari, 2024).

Beyond self-expression, Instagram offers features that help users build digital profiles, engage with others, and share everyday activities. In academic settings, social media acts as a virtual space for communication and community building. Students frequently use Instagram to share personal content photos, videos, and captions that reflect their identity and interests (Bestari et al., 2020).

Instagram's core function is to allow individuals to present their interests, activities, and personal life through visual content. It offers a platform for users to craft and display the image they want the public to see. For students, this becomes a powerful tool for asserting their presence and capturing attention within the digital world (Efendi et al., 2024).

One of Instagram's most innovative features is Reels, which enables users to create short videos enhanced with engaging visual and audio effects. Reels serve not only as entertainment but also as a creative outlet for personal expression perfectly suited to the fast-paced, expressive communication style of today's digital generation (Eryc, 2022).

University students pay close attention to social metrics such as likes, comments, views, and follower counts. These numbers are perceived as indicators of social recognition and online presence. As a result, students actively produce content for feeds, stories, and Reels to strengthen their digital identity and appeal to their audience (Efendi et al., 2024). This behavior is evident among second-semester mechanical engineering students at Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya. Nine out of ten students actively use Instagram to express themselves through content related to hobbies, daily routines, automotive interests, achievements, and entertainment. For them, Instagram functions as a creative space to shape and share their identity with the public (Efendi et al., 2024).

Generation Z digital natives by nature are the primary users of Instagram's latest features, especially Reels. They are the most adaptive to digital trends and represent the core target audience of the social media industry in this era of digital transformation, particularly in Indonesia (Eryc, 2022).

Based on this digital behavior, it is evident that students use Instagram not only as a tool for communication or entertainment but also as a medium for self-expression. The platform provides a space for them to convey emotions, thoughts, and identities through the visual content they post. Whether through photos, short videos, or captions, each upload reflects an effort to present who they are and how they wish to be perceived by others. In this context, self-expression becomes a crucial element that cannot be separated from students' social media activities. Social media, particularly Instagram, has become both a mirror of personal identity and a tool for shaping one's public image. In other words, self-expression on social media is part of the digital identity-building process that aligns closely with the lifestyle of today's youth.

Self-expression refers to the means by which individuals share their feelings, thoughts, identity, and creativity with others and the world around them. It can take various forms, including spoken and written language, visual arts, and music. By expressing themselves, individuals reveal their true selves, their emotions, and their worldview. This ability is shaped by numerous factors such as cultural background, personal experiences, and core values (Nella Viana Nur Ramadhanti & Abrian, 2024).

More specifically, Suryati (2025) said that self-expression also involves conveying thoughts and emotions through body movements and facial expressions. These can reflect feelings such as joy, disappointment, or dissatisfaction. In an educational context, this form of expression supports self-awareness and fosters a deeper understanding of one's surroundings, while also serving as a valuable learning tool (Suryati et al., 2025).

The way emotions are expressed plays a vital role in social interaction. Children, for instance, are expected to communicate their feelings in socially acceptable ways. This is closely tied to self-expression, which involves authentically conveying one's inner thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences. Expressing oneself helps in regulating emotions, understanding hidden feelings, and seeking support from others when needed (Kemasan et al., 2018).

During adolescence, self-expression becomes especially significant as teens navigate their search for identity and seek meaningful social connections. They often experiment with language as a way to explore and assert themselves socially (Majalengka et al., 2024). At the same time, adolescents may struggle with emotional uncertainty, including concerns about physical appearance and relationships with peers and family, all of which may impact their self-concept (Harisman et al., 2024).

In education, particularly in English language learning, self-expression is essential because it helps students connect personal experiences to academic material. It enables them to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and emotions confidently even in a non-native language. However, many learners face challenges in expressing themselves in English due to limited vocabulary or grammar skills (Adawiyah et al., 2024).

In line with self-expression, the concept of self-disclosure also plays a crucial role in communication and the development of interpersonal relationships. While self-expression emphasizes the ways individuals express their emotions and identity, self-disclosure focuses more on the extent to which a person willingly shares personal information with others. Self-disclosure is a form of personal communication where individuals share information about themselves with others. This act reflects a person's readiness to reveal personal aspects such as thoughts, emotions, imagination, and reactions to situations that are not immediately visible but are intentionally shared to help others understand them more fully (Riyani & Primasari, 2023).

This process does not only occur through spoken words but also through nonverbal cues. It involves sharing one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and occasionally details about others that are connected to personal experiences. All of this is done consciously as part of building deeper interpersonal connections (Rahayu et al., 2023). The shared information is typically private, not publicly known, and revealed intentionally as part of interpersonal dynamics (Mu'alifah & ., 2023). Trust is a fundamental element that encourages self-disclosure. When a person feels safe and comfortable with someone, they are more likely to share personal aspects that they wouldn't normally disclose. This sense of trust becomes the foundation for building meaningful and lasting

relationships (Sisnawar et al., 2023).

The ability to express oneself openly and appropriately is closely linked to positive personality traits. Those who are skilled at self-disclosure tend to be more confident, adaptable, open-minded, and socially competent. In contrast, people who struggle with self-disclosure often find it difficult to form close, trusting connections with others (Farrah et al., 2023). During early adulthood, self-disclosure becomes particularly important. At this stage, individuals are beginning to form more complex social relationships and need effective ways to strengthen social bonds. Sharing personal information becomes a way to foster emotional closeness and mutual understanding (Yizfretty Deslya Sarosija, 2024).

However, how often someone engages in self-disclosure is also influenced by their level of self-control. People with high self-control tend to be more deliberate and cautious when sharing personal details, especially online. On the other hand, those with lower self-control may act more impulsively and be more inclined to overshare, particularly on social media platforms (Nawangsari, S., Huda, N., & Puspita, 2024).

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between social media and how adolescents develop their self-expression and self-concept. One such study was conducted by (Efendi et al., 2024), titled *Social Media Instagram in Building Adolescents' Self-Existence*. The findings revealed that adolescents benefit from using Instagram as a tool for establishing their sense of identity. Instagram was seen to fulfill various psychological needs, including cognitive needs through updated and interest-based content, affective needs via the story feature for emotional expression, personal integrative needs through posts that reflect personal interests, social integrative needs via interactive tools like reply story, direct message, and comments, and escapist needs through entertainment content available on explore and reels features.

Another related study was carried out by (Harisman et al., 2024) under the title *The Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Self-Perception*. The results indicated that social media affects the self-concept of students at MTsN 4 Aceh Utara. These findings highlight the role of social media in adolescent identity formation and suggest that educational strategies should be developed to enhance its positive effects while minimizing potential negative impacts on youth development.

A similar perspective is presented in the research by (Eryc, 2022), titled *The Impact of TikTok Use on Self-Expression by Generation-Z Users*. The study found that Generation Z users' motivations for using TikTok vary by age group. As their individual needs are met, they become active users, integrating TikTok into their daily lives and using it as a primary platform for expressing themselves.

While these studies provide valuable insights into how social media platforms shape adolescent identity and self-expression, they share three common characteristics: they focus primarily on adolescents rather than university students, they investigate the psychological or social aspects of identity without examining linguistic choices in depth, and they center on general user populations or those from social science/humanities backgrounds. None have specifically addressed how students in technical fields, such as mechanical engineering, use visual-based platforms like Instagram Reels to express themselves in a foreign language, particularly English, within an EFL context. This intersection of self-disclosure, language use, and digital identity construction among vocational learners remains underexplored. Addressing this gap will not only expand current understanding of digital self-performance but also highlight how such practices contribute to

language development, emotional literacy, and identity negotiation in specialized academic communities.

The development of social media, particularly Instagram Reels, has created new spaces for university students to express themselves digitally. Mechanical engineering students, who are typically associated with academic fields rooted in science and technology, have also begun to utilize this platform to share moments from campus life, technical projects, and personal opinions. A preliminary survey of 30 mechanical engineering students revealed that 80% of respondents actively use the Reels feature, and 65% of them incorporate English into their content. These findings indicate a shift in communication patterns among engineering students, highlighting not only their academic competencies but also their ability to express themselves visually and verbally in digital spaces.

From time to time, scholars have largely focused on the general influence of social media platforms on adolescent behavior and self-concept. Most studies have concentrated on identifying the types of needs fulfilled by specific platforms and the effects on youth identity and social behavior. While these findings have enriched our understanding of digital behavior among students, previous research has predominantly focused on learners from social sciences or humanities backgrounds. Few studies have specifically examined how students in technical disciplines such as mechanical engineering use social media as a tool for identity formation and self-expression, particularly in a foreign language.

What has escaped the attention of previous researchers is how visual-based platforms like Instagram Reels or TikTok serve not only as social environments but also as linguistic and emotional arenas, especially among non-native English speakers in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. These platforms act as spaces where students perform identity, share emotions, and navigate cultural boundaries using another language. The intersection between self-disclosure, language use, and digital identity construction in these multilingual settings remains underexplored. To address this gap, this study proposes the integration of self-disclosure theory with the concept of digital self-performance, focusing on how university students in Indonesia express their identities in English through Instagram Reels. This conceptual framework allows for a deeper analysis of not just the psychological function of social media, but also its linguistic and cultural dimensions.

Thus, the main objective of this research is to analyze how self-disclosure in English via Instagram Reels reflects students' attempts to perform and negotiate their identities in a digital space. It also aims to identify patterns of expression that may inform future studies on language learning, emotional literacy, and self-representation in the EFL context. Ultimately, this research offers novelty by exploring digital self-expression in technical academic communities, and contributes to interdisciplinary discussions on communication, media literacy, and identity development in vocational education.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore and understand in depth the phenomenon of self-discourse through English language used by students on the Instagram Reels platform. This approach is considered appropriate because self-expression is a complex social and linguistic phenomenon that cannot be captured through quantitative data alone. Instead, it requires contextual exploration and direct engagement with participants' lived

experiences, as emphasized by Martha & Kresno (2016:2).

The participants in this study are vocational students who actively express themselves using English on Instagram Reels. A purposive sampling strategy will be used to select 5 to 7 participants who meet the following criteria:

- Active D3 mechanical engineering students.

- Use Instagram Reels as their main platform for self-expression.

- Consistently upload content where English is used explicitly for personal expression (e.g., in spoken narration, captions, or visual text).

A. Data Types and Data Collection

The primary data in this study consist of:

- Verbal data - English utterances and written captions created by students in their Instagram Reels content.

- Visual data - Non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and other visual elements that accompany the verbal messages.

- Narrative data from interviews - In-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant to explore their motivations, experiences, and perspectives related to using English for self-expression.

B. Data collection techniques include:

- Observation: Direct observation of students' Instagram Reels over a selected period (2–4 weeks), focusing on language use, frequency, and content themes.

- Documentation: Screenshots, screen recordings, and descriptive logs of selected Reels content.

- Interviews: One-on-one, semi-structured interviews (via Zoom or WhatsApp) with participants, guided by a set of open-ended questions to elicit detailed reflections.

- Observation and documentation provide data on the actual performance of self-disclosure, while interviews capture intentions, meaning, and linguistic choices from the student's point of view.

C. Data Analysis

Data will be analysed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model of descriptive qualitative analysis,

which includes:

- Data reduction: Selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant content from Reels and interview transcripts.

- Data display: Presenting patterns and themes in narrative form.

- Conclusion drawing and verification: Interpreting how students perform self-disclosure through English and confirming findings with data sources.

D. Data Validity and Trustworthiness

- To ensure the credibility of the data:

- Source triangulation is applied by comparing findings across multiple participants.

- Method triangulation involves cross-checking data from observations, interviews, and documentation.

- Member checking is conducted by sharing interpretations and summaries with participants to verify accuracy and representation of their experiences.

E. Research Ethics

Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and building rapport with participants. The researcher will respect the digital privacy of participants by only analyzing content that they voluntarily make available and give permission to include in the study.

In summary, the data in this study are drawn from three key sources: (1) Instagram Reels content produced by participants, including English-language captions, spoken utterances, and accompanying visuals; (2) interview transcripts that capture students' reflections, motivations, and linguistic choices in their self-expression; and (3) documentation such as screenshots and recordings used to support contextual analysis. These data types, collected through observation, documentation, and interviews, provide a rich and multifaceted basis to explore how Mechanical Engineering students construct self-identity through English on a social media platform. This comprehensive data set allows the researcher to examine both the surface-level performance and the deeper meanings behind students' self-disclosure practices.

3. Result and Discussion
3.1. Result

The researcher conducted observations on Instagram Reels social media, the main platform where the phenomenon of self-discourse on the use of English by university students takes place. This observation focuses on content uploaded by students that shows the practice of self-disclosure through the use of English. The observation covers various aspects such as word choice, communication style, topics discussed, interaction with audience, as well as the type of visual content that supports the English self-discourse. This observation aims to understand how students utilize Instagram Reelsfeatures to express their identity, thoughts and feelings in English.

Table 1. Observation Results related to the Self-Discourse Phenomenon of English Usage by College Students on Instagram Reels Social Media

No.	Aspects observed	Yes	No
1	The rampant use of English in self-expression content by university students.	√	
2	The type of content uploaded shows a variety of themes (e.g., daily life, opinions, hobbies) in English.	√	
3	There is a response from Instagram Reels users (like, comment, share) to English content.	√	
4	Use of different language styles (formal/informal) in English self-discourse.	√	
5	The use of visual elements (e.g., text, filters, audio) that support English self-discourse.	√	
6	Students show confidence in using English in Instagram Reels public spaces.	√	
7	Interaction between students or with other audiences occurs in English in the comments section.	√	
8	Students' motivation in conducting self-discourse in English (e.g., improving skills, seeking validation, sharing experiences).	√	
9	The selection of content topics is related to daily life or personal views.	√	
10	Instagram Reels is used as a means to build connections or communities based on the use of English.	√	

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with student participants to obtain more detailed information about the phenomenon of *self-discourse* in the use of English on Instagram Reels social media. In this interview, the researcher explored aspects around the beginning of their self-discourse, the motivation behind the use of English, and the impact and perception they felt after expressing themselves on the platform. The following are the results of the interviews presented in a table regarding the origin, reasons, and impact of English self-discourse.

Table 2: Results of Interviews with students regarding their reasons for self-disclosure

No.	Question	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	What motivated you to reveal yourself on Instagram Reels?	Want to share my experience as an overseas student	Want to build confidence	So that people know the struggles of my life	Because many have similar stories but are afraid to speak up	As self-therapy because it's hard confide directly

2	What personal stories or experiences do you usually share on Instagram Reels?	College stories and life away from parents	About body image and social pressure	About learning difficulties and small achievements	Experience of discrimination due to identity	Stories of relationships and the past in high school
3	Why did you choose Instagram Reels over other platforms?	Instagram Reels reaches more people faster	Instagram Reels's algorithm makes viral content easy	Can be expressive without fear of judgement	Instagram Reels feels like an open community	Because you can use voice, music, and free expression features
4	Do you use English when creating content? If yes, what is the reason?	Yes, to be more relatable to a wider audience	Sometimes, if the topic is more personal	Yes, because it gives me more freedom to express my emotions	Not always, but for certain topics yes	Yes, so as not to be too directly caught by people around
5	Do you feel more comfortable or free to express yourself in English?	Yes, because it is more neutral	Depends on the content	Yes, not really feeling judged	Sometimes yes, because it feels more expressive	Yes, like having a protective emotional distance
6	What impact does self-disclosure on Instagram Reels have on your personal life?	Be more confident and feel accepted	Sometimes anxious about being judged, but more honest with myself	Helps me accept myself	Feel less alone and stronger	So dare to limit toxic relationships
7	What motivates you to include English in your Reels content?	To improve my English skills	To sound more professional	Because it's trendy	Because many of my followers understand English	To express things better in English

8	In what kind of content do you feel most comfortable expressing yourself on Reels?	Personal emotional topics	Reflections on campus life	Social opinions or personal views	Past stories or difficult experiences	Honest spontaneous moments
9	How do others' reactions affect your willingness to open up on Reels?	I open up more after getting support	Sometimes afraid of being judged	Don't really care about reactions	I become more selective in sharing	Feel more confident when responses are positive
10	How do you feel after sharing something personal on Reels?	Accepted and understood	Know myself better	Slightly anxious	Like a weight lifted	Motivated to share even more

Table 3. Interview Results Regarding the Impact of Self-Disclosure on students

No.	Question	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	Does the use of English on Instagram Reels facilitate your self-disclosure?	Yes, it feels more neutral and less personalized	Yes, because it feels like emotional distancing	Yes, I am more comfortable sharing personal matters in English	Yes, more expressive and less inviting to local comments	Yes, as if being someone else is more courageous
2	How does your audience respond to your English content?	They say the content is cool and professional	Some say it's pretentious, but many also support it.	Many felt interested and asked about learning English	Positive, especially from overseas followers	Comments from overseas appear more frequently

3	Does self-disclosure in English help you in language learning?	Yes, I became more active in thinking in English	Yes, more courage to use new vocab without fear of being wrong	Very helpful in writing and speaking	I realised that my grammar is still lacking a lot	Yes, I am starting to be able to differentiate between formal and informal registers.
4	Do you think your background as a mechanical engineering student influences what you disclose?	Yes, I try to relate content to my academic life	I feel I need to sound more rational and less emotional	Sometimes I explain technical stuff in a personal way	Yes, but I also share things beyond engineering	I use engineering as a way to show my personality
5	What kind of engineering-related content do you feel comfortable sharing personally?	Reflections on group projects and teamwork	Technical struggles I overcame	Creative side of my projects	Successes and failures in lab or class	How I apply technical skills in daily life
6	Do you feel judged by peers in your department for what you share?	Not really, I keep it moderate	Sometimes, especially if it's emotional content	No, my friends actually support it	A bit, but I don't mind	I think they don't care much about it
7	How does self-disclosure help you as a mechanical engineering student?	It helps manage academic stress	I feel more human, not just a student	Builds my confidence when talking about my journey	Makes me reflect on my learning process	Helps connect with people from other disciplines

3.2 Discussion

1. Reasons why students do self-disclosure on Instagram Reels

Self-disclosure is a form of personal communication by students to openly express their experiences, emotions, and identity. The Instagram Reels platform is a popular space for them

because of its interactive and expressive nature. English is used in this process because it is considered more socially safe and more flexible in conveying sensitive matters.

"I'm more comfortable using English because it feels less personalised." (AL, 14/4/25)
"When I use English, I feel like I have distance. It's easier to vent without fear of being misunderstood by close people." (ZA, 14/4/25)

2. Instagram Reels as a Safe Space for Self-Expression

For the students, Instagram Reels became an alternative space to express themselves freely, especially when their surroundings did not allow them to speak openly. English also serves as an identity protector because not everyone understands their content.

"Because my family doesn't understand English, I can speak more freely on Instagram Reels without fear of offence." (ZA, 16/4/25)

This sense of security arises because students feel they can control who can understand the messages they convey.

3. The Function of English in *Self-Disclosure*
English not only serves as a communication tool but also a symbol of protection and style. Students claim to be more honest and dare to express themselves with this language because of the emotional distance created.

"Yes, it feels more neutral and less embarrassing." (LI, 18/4/25)

"It's pretentious, but for me it's a way to be able to tell stories without worrying." (AL, 18/4/25)

In addition, the use of English gives a professional and modern impression, broadens the audience, and increases self-confidence.

"I'm more confident when I speak English, so it's like the best version of myself." (LI, 18/4/25)

4. Motivation from Peer Content and Virtual Communities

Many respondents were encouraged to self-disclose after seeing other Instagram Reels users do the same in English. Similar content gave them courage and a sense of connection.

"Seeing other people vent using English makes me think, maybe I can too." (ZA, 16/4/25)
"Inspired, especially those from abroad. It feels relatable." (LI, 16/4/25)

This virtual community becomes a space of solidarity that encourages them not to feel

alone.

5. Self-Disclosure as Education and Self-Therapy

For some students, creating Instagram Reels content is not only to pour out their hearts, but also as a form of education to fellow students.

"I want my content to be a kind of education too, so people can know that student struggles are real."

This process is also a self-healing medium for them.

"It's like releasing a burden. After creating content, it feels really relieving." (RE, 21/4/25)

"I can reflect on myself from the videos I make." (AR, 21/4/25)

Positive and Negative Impacts of Self-Disclosure
Self-disclosure in English on Instagram Reels has had mixed impacts. Positive impacts include increased confidence, feelings of relief, and finding a supportive community.

"I feel stronger and free to be myself." (AR, 22/4/25)
"After I vented in English, many people DMed me and said they felt the same." (AL, 22/4/25)

But not all responses were positive. Some students faced negative comments or scorn.

"There are naysayers, but I've learnt not to care too much." (AL, 22/4/25)

However, the use of English is a means to curb negative effects because not everyone understands the content directly.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Instagram Reels has become a significant platform for vocational students to engage in English-language self-disclosure. The platform not only provides creative tools for expression but also offers a sense of control and comfort, allowing users to manage how they present themselves to various audiences. Students often choose to use English because it is perceived as more neutral and emotionally distanced, making it easier to express personal thoughts, academic pressures, and aspects of their evolving identity. Through Reels, they gain psychological benefits such as relief, validation, and enhanced self-confidence. Although there are potential risks such as negative comments or social judgment, the students in this study generally demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating these challenges.

In relation to English language acquisition, the findings indicate that students are informally developing their linguistic competence through real-life application. By creating and engaging with

content in English through captions, spoken narration, or hashtags they are practicing language skills in authentic, interest-driven contexts outside the classroom. In terms of identity performance, Reels enables students to construct and project curated digital personas that reflect their aspirations, creativity, and global orientation. Their language choices, content style, and non-verbal expressions form a symbolic performance of self in a social media space. Furthermore, this practice illustrates growing digital literacy among vocational learners, who show awareness of how to engage audiences, utilize platform features, and manage their online presence effectively. In an increasingly media-saturated society, these interrelated practices reflect how vocational students are simultaneously developing language, identity, and digital competence in meaningful, socially relevant ways.

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