



EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL MEDIA USE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract : This study aims to understand how learners view the role of digital platforms such as YouTube, online dictionaries, and learning applications, in enhancing their English skills. The qualitative method used in this study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with SMK Al-Maliki students who actively use digital media for learning English. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that digital media increases students' motivation and engagement; it provides access to authentic English exposure; it promotes both collaborative and independent learning; and there were some challenges arise due to unstable internet and distractions. The study concludes that digital media positively influences students' engagement and English learning experiences when used effectively. However, successful implementation requires balanced teacher guidance, adequate infrastructure, and learner self-discipline. The study suggests that integrating digital tools strategically can create more interactive, autonomous, and meaningful EFL learning experiences.

Keywords: Digital Media; Students' Perceptions; English Language Learning; Qualitative Study

Abstrak : Studi ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana peserta didik memandang peran platform digital seperti YouTube, kamus daring, dan aplikasi pembelajaran, dalam meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa Inggris mereka. Metode kualitatif digunakan dalam studi ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi- terstruktur dengan siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan Al-Maliki yang secara aktif menggunakan media digital untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Peserta dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa media digital meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa; menyediakan akses ke paparan bahasa Inggris yang autentik; mempromosikan pembelajaran kolaboratif dan mandiri; dan ada beberapa tantangan yang muncul karena internet yang tidak stabil dan gangguan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa media digital secara positif memengaruhi keterlibatan siswa dan pengalaman belajar bahasa Inggris ketika digunakan secara efektif. Namun, implementasi yang sukses membutuhkan bimbingan guru yang seimbang, infrastruktur yang memadai, dan disiplin diri peserta didik. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa mengintegrasikan perangkat digital secara strategis dapat menciptakan pengalaman belajar EFL yang lebih interaktif, otonom, dan bermakna.

Kata Kunci : Digital Media; Persepsi Siswa; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Penelitian Kualitatif

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital media has become an integral part of education, transforming the ways students access, process, and practice language learning. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, digital platforms such as YouTube, Duolingo, and TikTok are increasingly used to expose learners to authentic English input and interactive learning environments. According to Albiladi and Alshareef (2019), digital media fosters learners' engagement, motivation, and autonomy in acquiring language skills. Moreover, the integration of technology aligns with the principles of constructivism, where learners actively construct knowledge through digital interaction and exploration (Vygotsky, 1978). As English proficiency continues to be a key global skill, understanding how students use and perceive digital media becomes increasingly essential for improving the quality of English teaching and learning.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and is often limited by classroom time, traditional teaching methods, and students' limited exposure to authentic English input. Digital media offers a promising solution to these challenges by providing continuous opportunities for practice through videos, podcasts, learning applications, and social media. However, not all students perceive digital learning in the same way. Some students see digital media as a supportive and enjoyable learning tool, while others find it distracting or difficult to use effectively (Tian & Li, 2020). Some learners view it as a supportive tool for improving pronunciation, listening, and vocabulary, while others perceive it as a source of distraction or unreliable content. Therefore, exploring students' perceptions is crucial to understand how digital tools can best support their learning needs, preferences, and challenges or effective pedagogical integration.

The selection of this research topic is motivated by several reasons. First, the researcher observes that students increasingly rely on digital media in their daily lives, yet teachers may not fully understand how students actually use it for language learning. Second, despite many studies focusing on digital learning effectiveness, few have explored students' voices and personal experiences, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context at the secondary school level. Third, this topic is relevant to current educational trends that emphasize technology integration and student-centered learning. As stated by Rahman and Karim (2022), understanding students' perceptions helps educators design more responsive and meaningful digital-based learning strategies.

Furthermore, the study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain the role of digital media in language learning. From the constructivist viewpoint (Vygotsky, 1978), learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through social and digital interactions. The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009) supports the idea that combining visual and verbal information in digital media enhances comprehension and memory. Meanwhile, Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) emphasizes that learning happens through networks of digital connections. These theories collectively justify why digital media can be a powerful tool for EFL learning, yet they also highlight the importance of understanding how learners perceive and utilize these tools in real contexts.

Digital media has been widely discussed by many theorists across disciplines such as communication, education, and technology. The term generally refers to any content that is created, distributed, and accessed through digital technologies. The definitions vary depending on the theorists' perspectives and research focuses. According to Buckingham (2003), digital media refers to forms of communication that are based on digital technologies

rather than traditional print or analog formats. This definition highlights the technological transformation that underpins digital communication and how it differentiates from earlier analog methods. Similarly, Lister et al. (2009) defined digital media as products encoded in a machine-readable format that can be created, viewed, distributed, modified, and preserved on digital electronic devices. They emphasize the interactive and modifiable nature of digital content, showing how users are not only consumers but also creators. McQuail (2010) adds a communicative dimension, defining digital media as the convergence of communication technologies that enable interactivity, participation, and networking. His perspective situates digital media in the context of mass communication and social connectivity, emphasizing its participatory potential. From an educational and cultural perspective, Kellner and Share (2007) described digital media as cultural texts and tools that shape how people interpret, produce, and distribute meanings in the digital age. Their definition frames digital media as pedagogical instruments, shaping critical thinking and literacy practices.

The emergence of digital technology has brought a remarkable transformation in education, particularly in English language learning. Digital media such as YouTube, podcasts, online dictionaries, and social media platforms have become essential tools for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. These platforms enable students to access authentic English input, practice language skills independently, and engage in interactive learning environments. Albiladi and Alshareef (2019) emphasized that digital media enhances learner motivation, autonomy, and engagement, allowing students to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Similarly, Almurashi (2016) found that YouTube videos can effectively improve learners' listening comprehension and pronunciation by exposing them to authentic language use and real-life communication. In the Indonesian context, digital media is increasingly being used by students and teachers to overcome the limitations of traditional classroom instruction. Since exposure to English in daily life is limited, digital platforms provide alternative ways to experience and practice the language. However, the degree to which digital media contributes to learning outcomes depends largely on how students perceive, select, and engage with the tools available to them.

Numerous studies have reported that digital media positively impacts English language learning in several ways. First, digital tools help increase student motivation. The use of videos, animations, and games creates an engaging atmosphere that encourages students to participate more actively in learning (Rahman & Karim, 2022). Second, digital media provides exposure to authentic materials, which helps learners understand real-life English usage, accents, and contexts (Tian & Li, 2020). Third, digital media supports learner autonomy by allowing students to control their learning pace and choose materials based on their interests and proficiency levels. Finally, it enhances language skills development, particularly in listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition (Almurashi, 2016). Furthermore, digital media promotes interaction and collaboration among learners. Social media and online discussion forums, for instance, encourage students to communicate in English in less formal and more authentic settings. This interaction aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) idea that learning is a social process that occurs through communication and collaboration.

Despite its potential benefits, several challenges accompany the use of digital media in EFL learning. One common issue is distraction, as students may easily lose focus when using entertainment-oriented platforms such as YouTube or TikTok (Tian & Li, 2020). Another concern involves the credibility of online content—not all digital materials are reliable or linguistically appropriate for language learning. Additionally, unequal access to technology

and varying levels of digital literacy can hinder the effectiveness of digital media integration, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia. Moreover, the lack of teacher guidance is often cited as a problem. Without proper instructional direction, students may not know how to use digital media effectively for learning purposes (Rahman & Karim, 2022). This suggests that while digital media offers flexibility, it also requires structured guidance to ensure productive use.

Several studies have examined the role of digital media in EFL learning, they are; First, Almurashi (2016) found that YouTube videos significantly improved students' comprehension and pronunciation in Saudi EFL classrooms by providing authentic exposure to English speakers. Second, Tian and Li (2020) explored Chinese students' perceptions of mobile-assisted English learning and found that digital media increased learning motivation but required stronger self-regulation. Third, Rahman and Karim (2022) investigated Indonesian university students' use of social media in English learning and reported that platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp enhanced peer collaboration and language practice. These previous studies underline the growing importance of digital media but also highlight the need for further research on students' perceptions in different educational and cultural contexts.

In summary, this study differs from previous works by focusing on High school students, emphasizing perceptual and experiential perspectives, and employing multiple theoretical frameworks to interpret the findings. Thus, it contributes new insights into how digital media can be more effectively integrated into English language learning environments in similar educational contexts. Based on these considerations, the researcher chooses the title "Exploring Students' Perceptions of Digital Media Use in English Language Learning" to investigate how students experience, interpret, and evaluate the use of digital media in learning English. By exploring their perceptions, the study aims to reveal both the advantages and limitations of digital media integration and provide insights for teachers to enhance digital-based teaching practices in the EFL classroom.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The purpose of this design is to explore and describe students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding the use of digital media in English language learning. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of students' subjective views, feelings, and attitudes toward digital learning, which cannot be captured through numerical data alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this design, the study aims to interpret how students perceive the benefits, challenges, and effectiveness of using digital media in their English learning process.

The study was conducted at SMK AL-Maliki Lumajang, a vocational high school where English is taught as a foreign language. The participants were thirty students from the eleventh grade who had been using various digital media platforms, such as YouTube, Duolingo, Canva, Quizizz, and ELSA Speak, in their English learning activities. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active engagement with digital learning tools both in and outside the classroom. This sampling technique ensures that

participants possess sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights about the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and observation. All interviews were conducted in a comfortable classroom setting and recorded (with participants' consent) for accurate transcription. The main instrument in this study was the researcher, who served as the primary data collector and interpreter (Merriam, 2009). Supporting instruments included an interview guide, observation checklist, and a voice recorder and field notes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, several strategies such as triangulation, member checking, peer-debriefing, and thick description were applied in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

Digital Media as a Motivational and Engaging Learning Tool

Students consistently expressed that digital media increases their enjoyment and involvement in English lessons. Interactive platforms such as YouTube, Quizizz, and Kahoot created a learning environment that felt more like play than formal study, making students more willing to participate and stay focused. One student shared:

"Ketika kami belajar bahasa Inggris dengan video dan kuis-kuis online itu, saya merasa tertarik karena menyenangkan dan tidak bosan seperti ketika membaca buku."

"When we learn English with videos or online quizzes, I feel more excited because it's fun and not boring like only reading the book."

Additional student comments suggested that digital activities also helped reduce anxiety and build confidence, especially for those who usually feel shy in class:

"Kalau ada game atau video, rasanya percaya diri untuk mencoba. Tidak takut salah."

"When there are games or videos, I feel confident to try. I'm not afraid of making mistakes."

Observation data demonstrated increased student participation, laughter, and voluntary responses when multimedia and gamified tasks were used. In contrast, lessons without digital media showed lower enthusiasm, more silence, and slower task completion. These trends suggest that digital tools help create a more supportive, dynamic, and motivating classroom atmosphere.

Digital Media as a Source of Authentic Language Exposure

Students reported that digital platforms enabled them to listen to native speakers and experience English in real-life contexts. YouTube, TikTok, podcasts, and English bloggers were frequently mentioned as valuable sources of pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking models.

"Dari YouTube atau TikTok, aku bisa belajar bahasa Inggris langsung dari bule dan membantuku meningkatkan listening dan pengucapan."

"From YouTube or TikTok videos, I can learn real English from native speakers, and it helps me improve my listening and pronunciation."

Beyond pronunciation, several students noted that digital content also exposed them to cultural expressions, slang, and natural speech speed—elements not typically available in textbooks. Some students mentioned trying to imitate accents or repeat phrases heard in

videos. Observation also supported this, as learners occasionally quoted phrases from videos during class discussions or used vocabulary they had encountered online. This indicates active transfer of input from digital exposure to classroom production.

Digital Media Supporting Collaborative and Independent Learning

Students valued the flexibility of digital media to support both group and individual learning. Collaborative tasks using Google Classroom, WhatsApp groups, and Canva encouraged peer support, idea sharing, and cooperative problem-solving.

"Aku bisa belajar sendiri pakai aplikasi, tapi kadang-kadang aku juga tanya teman supaya bantu di chat grup."

"I can learn by myself using apps, but sometimes I also ask friends for help in our group chat."

Learners explained that digital platforms allowed them to work together on presentations and assignments, practice pronunciation using applications at home, review lessons at their own pace, and access explanations from multiple online sources. Some students admitted feeling more confident asking questions online than in face-to-face discussions. This suggests digital media scaffolds both social learning and self-regulated learning, depending on student needs and preferences.

Challenges in Accessibility and Self-Regulation

Although students appreciated digital learning, they also experienced difficulties related to internet reliability, device limitations, and distractions.

"Kadang-kadang ketika aku buka YouTube untuk belajar, aku akhirnya menonton video lain yang tidak berhubungan dengan bahasa Inggris."

"Sometimes when I open YouTube to learn, I end up watching other videos not related to English."

Some students mentioned limited internet data and having to share devices with family members. Others reported that notifications and entertainment content often interfered with concentration. A few participants expressed frustration when technological issues made them miss assignments or class instructions. Despite these obstacles, most students still preferred lessons that involved digital tools, but emphasized the need for clear teacher guidance and time management skills.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital media plays a meaningful role in shaping students' learning experiences in EFL classrooms. First, the increased motivation and engagement observed through the use of multimedia and gamified applications align with constructivist principles, which emphasize that learners actively build knowledge when they are emotionally and cognitively engaged (Vygotsky, 1978). This engagement was visible in students' enthusiastic responses and willingness to participate in class activities. Such findings are consistent with prior studies by Majid et al. (2025) and Albiladi and Alshareef (2019), who reported that digital learning media enhance motivation and improve classroom participation. The present study adds evidence from Indonesian secondary learners, showing that digital content not only increases interest but also reduces anxiety and supports confidence building.

Second, students' exposure to authentic language input through media such as YouTube, TikTok, and podcasts reinforces the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), which states that learning is strengthened when information is presented through both visual and auditory channels. Students' comments in this study highlight that digital platforms offer real conversational English, natural pronunciation, and diverse vocabulary—supporting Tian and Li's (2020) argument that online materials promote communicative competence by providing learners with authentic linguistic input beyond textbook content. This shows that digital media bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world language usage, thus facilitating more meaningful language practice.

Third, the dual role of digital media in fostering both collaborative and independent learning reflects the principles of Connectivism, where learning occurs through digital networks and social interaction (Siemens, 2005). Students reported using collaborative tools like Google Classroom and WhatsApp to exchange ideas, illustrating how technology supports peer interaction and shared learning tasks. Simultaneously, learners utilized independent learning applications, echoing Little's (1991) concept of learner autonomy in language learning. The present findings show that students can flexibly move between collaborative and self-driven learning modes depending on task demands, indicating that digital environments empower learners to take ownership of their learning.

Finally, the challenges identified—such as distractions, inconsistent internet access, and limited device availability indicate that motivation alone is insufficient for sustained success. This aligns with Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulated learning framework, which emphasizes the importance of discipline and self-management in academic performance. The temptation to access entertainment instead of learning reinforces Rahman and Karim's (2022) findings that digital tools can hinder learning when learners lack proper regulation or technological support. Thus, while digital media provides opportunities for interactive and flexible learning, effective guidance, digital literacy training, and structured classroom management are necessary to maximize its benefits.

Overall, these findings suggest that digital media serves as both a pedagogical and affective support system in EFL learning, offering motivation, authentic exposure, and flexible learning pathways. However, its successful implementation requires teacher facilitation, student self-regulation, and institutional support. This study contributes to existing scholarship by highlighting secondary learners' perspectives in an Indonesian EFL context, expanding previous research that often focuses on higher education. Digital media, therefore, should be integrated strategically to complement traditional instruction and foster balanced, meaningful, and well-supported language learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions of thirty eleventh-grade students at SMK Al Maliki Lumajang regarding the use of digital media in English language learning. The findings revealed that students generally hold positive attitudes toward digital media, viewing it as an engaging, flexible, and effective tool that enhances their motivation, provides authentic exposure to English, and supports both collaborative and independent learning. There are four major themes emerged from the analysis. They are digital media as a motivational and engaging learning tool, which helps reduce boredom and increase enthusiasm for learning English; digital media as a source of authentic language exposure, allowing students to access real-life English content from native speakers; digital media as support for collaborative and

independent learning, where students benefit from both group-based and autonomous learning practices. And challenges in accessibility and self-regulation, where unstable internet connections and distractions hinder consistent learning.

These findings suggest that digital media plays a significant role in transforming traditional EFL learning into a more interactive, learner-centered experience. However, effective digital learning requires adequate guidance, infrastructure, and students' ability to self-manage their learning. In line with theories such as Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), and Connectivism (Siemens, 2005), this study emphasizes that learning is most effective when technology is used to build understanding, connect learners, and engage multiple senses.

This study also confirms that digital media has become an integral part of modern English language learning. When supported by proper guidance, accessibility, and learner autonomy, digital media can significantly enhance the quality, motivation, and authenticity of EFL instruction in the Indonesian educational context, especially for students at SMK Al Maliki Lumajang.

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