

Examining the influence of social media and peer environments on motivation, self-regulation, and learning experiences among Indonesian ELLs

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the limited understanding of how social media and peer environments simultaneously shape English language learning, particularly in terms of their dual impact on learners' motivation, self-regulation, and learning experiences. While previous research has often emphasized the benefits of digital tools or peer interaction, it has paid less attention to their contradictory effects and the challenges they pose for learners' emotional well-being and self-regulation. Using a mixed-methods design, this study collected survey data from 51 English language learners (ELLs) across five major cities in Indonesia, followed by in-depth interviews with five participants. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to enable triangulation. The findings reveal that social media enhances motivation, engagement, and language exposure, but also contributes to distraction and emotional strain. Similarly, peer environments promote collaboration and confidence while simultaneously generating anxiety and social pressure. These findings highlight the complex and often contradictory roles of digital and peer-mediated learning environments. This study contributes to the literature by foregrounding the dual impact of these environments and emphasizing the importance of fostering learner self-regulation and emotional well-being. It offers pedagogical implications for the strategic integration of social media and the development of supportive peer networks in English language learning contexts.

Keywords: English language learning; learning experience; peer environment; self-regulation; social media

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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally transformed how English language learners (ELLs) engage in language acquisition, particularly through the integration of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, alongside digitally mediated peer environments. A growing body of research highlights the potential of social media to provide authentic exposure, multimodal input, and informal learning opportunities beyond classroom boundaries, there remains limited understanding of how these opportunities translate into sustained academic literacy development and learner autonomy in

formal educational contexts (Kukulska-Hulme & Lee, 2020; Mulyono & Suryoputo, 2020; Figueiredo, 2023; Abidin, 2023). However, this perspective often overlooks the complexities and unintended consequences of such engagement. In practice, learners' interactions with digital content are not always pedagogically driven, and the abundance of user-generated material may blur the boundaries between meaningful learning and passive consumption. As a result, the role of social media in shaping motivation and engagement remains complex and context-dependent (Saeed, 2021; Hu & Du, 2022).

Beyond access to digital resources through social media, peer environments significantly shape how learners engage with these platforms. Collaborative peer interaction can enhance self-efficacy and support learning, although its effects are not always positive (Pyle et al., 2017; Cole, 2018; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ahmed et al., 2023). In digital contexts, peer interaction may foster support while also creating pressure, competition, and evaluative anxiety that contribute to uneven participation (Plenty & Mood, 2016; Gao et al., 2025). Social media and peer-based learning environments also present substantial challenges. Learners are frequently exposed to distractions such as non-academic content, multitasking, and constant notifications, which may reduce concentration and task completion (Alyousef, 2025; Abidin, 2023). Furthermore, negative peer dynamics, unhealthy competition, and unequal digital access may intensify anxiety and participation gaps among learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Ahmed et al., 2023; Plenty & Mood, 2016). Overall, these environments reflect the dual nature of digitally mediated learning, where opportunities and constraints coexist.

However, the opportunities offered by social media and peer-based digital environments are also accompanied by significant challenges. In academic English learning contexts, learners are increasingly exposed to digital distractions, including non-academic content, multitasking during online learning activities, and constant notifications from social media platforms, which may disrupt concentration and task completion (Alyousef, 2025; Abidin, 2023). In addition, excessive engagement with digital platforms may reduce learners' ability to maintain sustained attention and balanced learning routines. Within peer contexts, negative group dynamics, unhealthy competition, and unequal access to digital resources may exacerbate anxiety and participation gaps, particularly among learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Ahmed et al., 2023; Plenty & Mood, 2016). Such conditions may also influence learners' confidence, emotional well-being, and willingness to participate actively in collaborative learning activities. These tensions point to the inherently dual and often contradictory nature of digitally and socially mediated learning environments, where opportunities and constraints coexist and interact in shaping learners' experiences.

Existing studies have examined the benefits of social media for enhancing motivation, vocabulary development, and communicative competence, as well as the role of peer collaboration in fostering confidence and collaborative learning (Latif, 2021; Figueiredo, 2023; Saeed, 2021; Cole, 2018; Pyle et al., 2017). Other research has explored coping mechanisms in online learning contexts, including metacognitive regulation, emotional resilience, and social support strategies (Faza & Lestari, 2025; Gao et al., 2025). In addition, several studies (Ribahan & Muslimin, 2025; Derinalp, 2025; Volya, 2025) have emphasized that digitally mediated learning environments encourage learners to participate more actively in interactive and autonomous learning practices. Nevertheless, existing studies (Masluha et al., 2025; Lee, 2025) tend to examine social media use and peer interaction as separate constructs, resulting in a fragmented understanding of learners' experiences. This separation limits insight into how these factors interact simultaneously to shape both learning opportunities and constraints in authentic learning situations. Importantly, it obscures how learners actively regulate their engagement in response to competing motivational, social, emotional, and cognitive demands within digitally mediated learning environments.

Moreover, prior research has rarely examined how social media engagement and peer dynamics operate simultaneously as interconnected influences, particularly in shaping learners' self-regulation in managing cognitive, social, and emotional demands (Lewis, 2022; Rop et al., 2018). Much of the existing literature also adopts a predominantly descriptive approach, focusing on either benefits or challenges separately, with limited attention to how learners negotiate these tensions in authentic learning contexts (Oladimeji & Opoola, 2021; Sirota, 2020). This limitation is especially significant in

the Indonesian EFL context, where high social media use among learners is not yet matched by sufficient understanding of how digital engagement intersects with peer dynamics in academic settings. Although Indonesian learners are among the most active social media users globally (Chi & Long, 2022), little is known about how they manage the combined pressures of digital participation and peer expectations in English learning. Importantly, empirical evidence integrating quantitative and qualitative insights into learners' lived experiences remains limited.

Consequently, the ways in which learners experience challenges and develop coping strategies in such environments remain under-researched. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an integrative perspective by examining the dual impact of social media and peer environments on learners' motivation, self-regulation, and learning experiences. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study combines quantitative data on learners' digital practices with qualitative insights into their perceived challenges and coping strategies. By focusing on the interaction between external digital influences and internal regulatory processes, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts and offers a more nuanced understanding of how learners actively manage their learning in complex digital environments. Accordingly, the research questions are formatted as follows:

1. How do ELLs use social media and peer environments to support their English language learning?
2. What opportunities and challenges do ELLs experience when engaging with social media and peer environments for English language learning?
3. How do ELLs regulate their learning and cope with the challenges arising from social media and peer environments?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language learners (ELLs) in the digital era

In digitally mediated EFL contexts, ELLs must navigate linguistic challenges alongside motivation, self-regulation, and sustained engagement in technology-rich environments. These demands shape learners' participation in digital learning spaces influenced by both internal and external factors. In such contexts, learners face uneven access to high-quality input, varying relevance of online content, and difficulties maintaining focus amid abundant non-academic materials (Richards & Schmidt, 2017; Li, 2022). This complexity is intensified in EFL settings where English is rarely used in daily communication, making learners more dependent on mediated input and instructional scaffolding (Aldamen et al., 2025; Boonma, 2026). These citations are not listed in the reference list. Revise by adding the source in reference list.

Consequently, learners' ability to sustain motivation and regulate engagement becomes essential in transforming digital resources into meaningful language learning opportunities.

Despite these challenges, the digital era has also transformed language learning by expanding access to multimodal resources, self-directed learning platforms, and informal interactional spaces. Learners can now personalize learning strategies aligned with their cognitive styles and motivational profiles (Zheng et al., 2018; Dincer, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these potentials remains conditional, as digital autonomy can enhance learner agency and engagement only when supported by strong self-regulation. Without the ability to regulate attention, goals, and learning strategies, increased autonomy may instead lead to disengagement and fragmented learning experiences (Maaga & Mokwena, 2023; Uthus & Løhre, 2025). This suggests that the benefits of digital environments are not automatically realized but depend on how learners manage and sustain their engagement within them.

Beyond individual engagement with digital resources, these learning processes are further shaped by learners' social environments, particularly peer interactions, which can either support or constrain participation depending on access to resources, group dynamics, and shared learning norms (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Khoirunnisa, 2023). Peer interaction not only provides opportunities for collaboration and feedback but also introduces elements of comparison, expectation, and social influence that affect learners' motivation and engagement. These findings reinforce the view that ELLs

constitute a heterogeneous population with diverse proficiency levels, learning trajectories, and motivational dispositions (Albert, 2010; Lin et al., 2016). Accordingly, contemporary EFL pedagogy increasingly calls for context-sensitive, learner-centered, and digitally integrated instructional approaches that account for both individual and social dimensions of learning (Brown, 2007; Liu et al., 2026).

Social media as a learning environment

Social media platforms have increasingly been positioned as informal learning environments in EFL contexts; however, their pedagogical value remains contingent on how learners engage with and interpret the content available within these spaces. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok provide learners with exposure to authentic discourse, multimodal input, and informal interaction within global communities of practice (Saeed, 2021; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022). Empirical studies suggest that social media-mediated learning can support motivation, vocabulary development, pronunciation awareness, and intercultural competence (Figueiredo, 2023; Alsalami, 2026); however, these benefits are often conditional upon purposeful engagement, as passive consumption or excessive use may limit meaningful learning outcomes and reduce opportunities for reflection, collaborative interaction, and language practice among learners.

Furthermore, online communities and digital influencers function as alternative sources of feedback, identity construction, and social validation, which can enhance learners' sense of belonging and willingness to communicate (Cole, 2018; Reinhardt, 2019). Such environments blur the boundary between formal and informal learning, positioning learners as active participants rather than passive recipients of instruction (Gravino et al., 2025; Osborne, 2025). In addition, digital interaction enables learners to negotiate meaning, develop online identities, and engage in collaborative knowledge construction across multicultural contexts. Recent studies also indicate that social media-based environments encourage learner autonomy, reflective participation, and sustained engagement in language learning activities, particularly when learners actively contribute to discussions and content creation rather than merely consuming information.

Nevertheless, these potentials must be understood in relation to the challenges of sustaining attention and managing competing digital stimuli, highlighting the need to examine not only what social media offers but also how learners regulate their engagement within such environments. Exposure to non-standard language forms, algorithm-driven distractions, and unreliable content may hinder the development of academic vocabulary and formal writing skills (Hwang et al., 2024; Marleni & Asilestari, 2018). Excessive and unguided use of social media has also been linked to procrastination, reduced attention span, and diminished academic self-confidence (Aliyah, 2023; Abidin, 2023). In addition, constant exposure to entertainment-oriented content may reduce learners' focus on meaningful academic interaction and reflective learning practices. Recent studies highlight the importance of critical digital literacy and guided pedagogical integration to mitigate these risks (Costa & Oliver, 2025; McPhee & Jerowsky, 2025).

Peer environment and language development

Peer environments shape language development by influencing learners' opportunities for interaction, feedback, and social comparison, affecting both cognitive and socio-emotional growth. Positive peer interaction can increase motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate (Cole, 2018; Pyle et al., 2017), although peer dynamics may also create pressure, competition, and fear of negative evaluation in digitally visible learning spaces. Collaborative activities such as peer tutoring, group discussions, and cooperative learning support vocabulary development, communicative confidence, and higher-order thinking skills (Phan & Dao, 2023; Kaur et al., 2021). From a sociocultural perspective, language learning occurs through shared meaning-making and dialogic engagement (Samar & Parsaie, 2025), increasingly facilitated through social media, where learners negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and regulate participation according to peer expectations and social presence.

Supportive peer groups can reduce language anxiety and increase participation, particularly in inclusive environments that promote mutual respect (Plenty & Mood, 2016; Namaziandost et al., 2024). In contrast, negative peer dynamics, such as social exclusion, unhealthy competition, or linguistic judgment, may exacerbate anxiety and lead to disengagement (Ahmed et al., 2023; Bhujbal & Verma, 2024). Learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are especially vulnerable to marginalization within peer groups dominated by resource-advantaged members, which can undermine confidence and sustained engagement (Khan, 2011; Shao et al., 2024). These contrasting effects indicate that peer environments operate as both facilitative and constraining forces, with outcomes contingent on group norms, power relations, and access to resources. However, existing studies rarely examine how these dual roles unfold in tandem with digital participation, leaving the interaction between peer dynamics and online engagement insufficiently understood.

Integrating these perspectives suggests that peer-induced pressure mediates the relationship between motivation and digital engagement in contemporary EFL learning. In digitally mediated environments, visibility through public posts, comments, and likes intensifies social comparison and evaluative concerns, which may either encourage persistence or provoke avoidance and self-censorship (Gao et al., 2025; Tenenboim, 2025). When shaped by supportive norms, peer influence can strengthen motivation, sustained engagement, and productive interaction. However, competitive or judgmental environments may disrupt self-regulation and reduce learners' perceived benefits of technology use. This dynamic highlights the importance of examining peer environments as interconnected systems where motivation, pressure, and digital engagement collectively influence participation and learning outcomes. Such an integrative perspective clarifies how learners interpret and respond to peer influence while using social media for language learning.

Learning outcomes, barriers, and coping strategies

Learning outcomes in English language education extend beyond mastery of the four core skills to include critical thinking, digital literacy, learner autonomy, and collaborative competence (Sadiku, 2015; ETEC, 2024). Rather than examining learning outcomes, barriers, and coping strategies as isolated constructs, it is important to consider how these dimensions interact within digitally mediated and socially influenced learning environments (Amansyah et al., 2023; Bozca & Koc, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these environments is contingent upon learners' ability to navigate cognitive, emotional, and social challenges (Zhou, 2021; Zhang, 2023). In this regard, learning outcomes are not merely end results but are dynamically shaped by how learners manage constraints and opportunities within digital and peer-mediated contexts. These processes also influence learners' engagement, resilience, and capacity to sustain meaningful participation in technology-supported learning activities.

Common barriers include digital distraction, peer pressure, exposure to inappropriate language models, and unequal access to credible learning resources (Sendihe, 2023; Zhou, 2021). In response, learners adopt various coping strategies, such as selective engagement with educational content, self-regulation techniques, peer-based support, and digital mindfulness practices (Faza & Lestari, 2025; Gao et al., 2025). Active learner participation, through content creation, peer mentoring, and curated learning communities, has been empirically linked to improved focus, autonomy, and academic confidence (Djiwandono, 2000; Syahira et al., 2024). These adaptive strategies highlight that success in digital learning environments depends not merely on technological access but on learners' regulatory capacity and socio-emotional resilience. Thus, coping strategies function as a critical mechanism through which learners transform potential barriers into productive learning experiences.

Importantly, the effectiveness of these coping strategies is closely tied to the interplay between motivation, peer-induced pressure, and digital engagement. Learners with higher motivation are more likely to employ adaptive strategies, whereas excessive peer pressure or unmanaged digital distractions may hinder their ability to regulate learning effectively. This suggests that learning outcomes are co-constructed through the interaction of internal dispositions and external influences, rather than determined by any single factor. Therefore, examining how learners balance these elements is essential for understanding how meaningful and sustainable learning outcomes are achieved in digitally

mediated EFL contexts. In addition, supportive peer interaction and constructive digital participation may strengthen learners' resilience, confidence, and engagement, enabling them to cope more effectively with academic demands and technology-related challenges in online learning environments.

Synthesis and research gap

Synthesizing the reviewed literature highlights that social media and peer environments exert significant yet complex influences on English language learning. Prior studies have documented their respective contributions to motivation, cultural awareness, collaborative learning, and authentic language exposure (Latif, 2021; Reinhardt, 2019; Cole, 2018), as well as their associated challenges, including distraction, anxiety, and social inequity (Kadir & Salija, 2018; Wati et al., 2024). Social media platforms enable learners to access diverse English resources, engage in peer feedback, and participate in interactive communication practices that strengthen engagement and language development. However, these perspectives remain largely fragmented, as social media use and peer interaction are often examined separately, limiting a comprehensive understanding of how these influences operate simultaneously in digitally mediated EFL learning contexts.

Importantly, while some studies have explored coping mechanisms in digital learning contexts, such as metacognitive regulation and emotional resilience (Gao et al., 2025), limited attention has been given to how learners actively regulate their engagement when simultaneously navigating the demands of social media participation and peer expectations. This indicates that learners' experiences cannot be fully explained by external factors alone but require consideration of the dynamic interplay between environmental influences and internal regulatory processes. Within the Indonesian EFL context, this complexity is further shaped by sociocultural norms and patterns of digital engagement, where peer interaction and online participation are closely intertwined.

Despite the high prevalence of social media use among Indonesian learners, empirical studies examining how these factors jointly influence motivation, learning experiences, and self-regulation in academic English learning remain limited (Wati et al., 2024). Previous studies have primarily focused on isolated aspects, such as motivation, writing performance, or peer interaction, without sufficiently examining how these dimensions interact within digitally mediated learning environments. Social media platforms may simultaneously encourage collaborative learning, authentic language exposure, and learner autonomy while also creating distractions and social pressure that affect self-regulatory practices. In this regard, the present study positions itself as an effort to provide a more integrated understanding of how social media and peer environments jointly shape learners' motivation, self-regulation, and learning experiences in contemporary academic English learning contexts.

METHOD

Research design and objectives

Research design serves as a systematic framework that guides researchers in selecting appropriate procedures to address research objectives within specific contextual settings. In studies examining learners' behaviors, perceptions, and lived experiences in EFL contexts, relying solely on either quantitative or qualitative approaches may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. Quantitative approaches are effective for identifying generalizable patterns, whereas qualitative approaches provide deeper contextual understanding of participants' experiences and coping strategies. However, this study acknowledges that findings derived from a particular educational setting may not be fully transferable to other contexts, thereby suggesting the need for future studies involving broader populations and cross-cultural settings (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

Considering the complexity of the research problem, a mixed-methods research design was considered the most appropriate approach because it integrates the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2020). Specifically, this study employed an explanatory sequential design in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection to further explain and elaborate the quantitative findings. The quantitative strand focused on identifying trends in learners'

behaviors and perceptions, while the qualitative strand explored learners' lived experiences in greater depth. This methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings (Nowel, et al., 2017).

Research location and participants

The research was conducted across selected public and private universities in major Indonesian cities, including Surabaya, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Medan, Batam, and Makassar. These locations were selected to represent diverse sociocultural and educational settings in Indonesian EFL contexts, where digital learning and peer interaction play an increasingly prominent role. These locations were selected to capture variation in sociocultural backgrounds, levels of digital access, and higher education environments, which are relevant to understanding diverse English language learning experiences in Indonesian EFL contexts. Participants were undergraduate students majoring in English Language Education. The inclusion criteria were that participants (1) were actively studying English as a foreign language, (2) regularly used social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube for English learning purposes, and (3) were aged 18 years or older. Purposive sampling was initially employed to recruit participants who were actively engaged in English language learning and regularly used social media for academic or learning-related purposes. Subsequently, snowball sampling was applied by asking initial participants to refer peers with similar learning experiences, thereby expanding the participant pool. A total of 51 students completed the online questionnaire, which was considered sufficient to provide an initial quantitative overview of learners' digital practices and experiences across diverse contexts. From this group, five participants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to ensure variation in terms of social media practices, peer interaction experiences, and perceived learning challenges. Such sampling strategies are commonly employed in mixed-methods research to maximize informational richness rather than statistical representativeness (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data sources and research instruments

The data sources comprised self-reported survey responses and semi-structured interview narratives. The quantitative instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with 12 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The items were distributed across three constructs: (1) social media use for language learning (4 items), (2) peer interaction and influence (4 items), and (3) perceived challenges and coping strategies in digitally mediated learning environments (4 items).

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review involving two specialists in English language education and educational assessment. The experts evaluated the items in terms of clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study constructs. Based on their feedback, several items were revised to improve wording clarity and ensure conceptual consistency across constructs. Reliability testing of the questionnaire yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. In addition, reliability was examined at the construct level, with coefficients of 0.80 for social media use, 0.78 for peer interaction, and 0.79 for perceived challenges and coping strategies, suggesting acceptable reliability across all dimensions (Taber, 2018).

The qualitative instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' reflections on their social media learning practices, peer experiences, challenges encountered, and strategies for coping with digital and social pressures. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility while maintaining alignment with the study's analytical focus (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

Data collection procedures

In line with the explanatory sequential design, data collection was conducted in two phases, beginning with quantitative data collection, followed by a qualitative phase to further explain the initial findings. In the quantitative phase, the questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, with links shared through social media platforms and online student communities. While this approach enabled broad

and efficient participant recruitment across multiple regions, it may have introduced sampling bias by primarily reaching learners who are more digitally active and already engaged in online environments. Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily over a two-week period. In the qualitative phase, five participants were invited for individual semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom or Google Meet. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian or English, depending on participants' preference, to ensure clarity and comfort. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy and completeness of the data. This procedure aligns with best practices in qualitative educational research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data analysis technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to identify patterns in learners' social media use, peer interactions, perceived barriers, and coping strategies. These analyses were used to provide an overall profile of learners' experiences and to inform the selection and interpretation of qualitative data in the subsequent phase. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' responses and provide an overview of the observed patterns in the data (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives rather than being imposed beforehand. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted with the interview participants. After the initial analysis, participants were provided with summaries of the interpreted findings and were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Feedback from participants was incorporated to refine and validate the thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred at the interpretation and discussion stage, enabling cross-validation and a more holistic understanding of how social media and peer environments jointly shape ELLs' learning experiences.

Data analysis finding

To clarify how each data set addresses the study objectives, Table 1 summarizes the alignment between the research questions, quantitative survey indicators, and qualitative interview prompts (Participants A–E).

Table 1

Alignment between RQ, Quantitative Indicators, and Qualitative Prompts

Research question/objective	Quantitative indicators (survey)	Qualitative prompts (interview)
RQ1. How do ELLs use social media and peer environments to support learning/achievement?	Platform use (YouTube/Instagram/TikTok), perceived learning benefits, peer support items, learning engagement.	Examples of how participants use specific platforms; peer collaboration practices; perceived learning gains.
RQ2. What opportunities and challenges do ELLs experience when engaging with social media and peer environments for English language learning?	Opportunities (motivation, authentic exposure, cultural insights, peer encouragement); Challenges (distraction, social comparison, emotional strain, information overload, access constraints, academic language difficulties)	Experiences of learning opportunities; experiences of distraction, pressure, anxiety, comparison, and other challenges
RQ3. How do ELLs regulate their learning and cope with the challenges arising from social media and peer environments?	Self-regulation behaviors (filtering content, time management, accountability), perceived effectiveness.	Strategies used to maintain focus, manage distractions, regulate learning, and sustain engagement

Participant profile and instrument reliability

Survey participants (n=51) were undergraduate ELLs from several major Indonesian cities (e.g., Surabaya, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Medan, Batam, and Makassar) and were aged 18 years or above. Five participants (A–E) were purposively selected for interviews to represent varied digital practices and peer-interaction experiences. Questionnaire reliability was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = .82), supporting the internal consistency of the 12 Likert-scale items.

Table 2

Reliability Analysis of the Research Questionnaire

Reliability statistic	Value
Cronbach's alpha (12 items)	.82

Quantitative findings

Table 3 summarizes the main survey patterns that are referenced throughout the results and discussion. Percentages are based on n=51.

Table 3

Survey Patterns through Results and Discussion

Domain	Indicator	Result (%, n=51)
Social media platforms	YouTube used for English learning	72.5%
Social media platforms	Instagram used for English learning	68.6%
Social media platforms	TikTok used for English learning	54.9%
Barriers	Distracted by non-academic content	61%
Barriers	Difficulty distinguishing informal vs academic English	47%
Perceived impact	Social media increased motivation to learn English	68%

Qualitative findings (interviews): Organized themes and evidence

The interview evidence is presented under clear sub-headings to show how participants (A–E) experienced the same opportunities and challenges described in the survey.

Theme 1: Authentic exposure and motivation through social media

Participants described using YouTube and short-video platforms to access authentic input and keep motivation high. For example, Participant A said, “*I use YouTube almost every day to practice listening. It feels like I'm learning from real speakers, not just textbooks.*” Participant D also noted that social media can be inspiring, yet time-consuming when not controlled.

Theme 2: Distraction, comparison, and emotional strain

Distraction and social comparison were repeatedly mentioned. Participant B explained that learning posts easily turn into entertainment scrolling. Participant A added that seeing others' apparent fluency online sometimes triggered feelings of being left behind, lowering confidence.

Theme 3: Peer support that helps—and pressure that inhibits

Peers were described as both a source of scaffolding (e.g., pronunciation help) and a trigger for performance anxiety. Participant D felt encouraged when friends corrected pronunciation, whereas Participant E sometimes avoided speaking in group chats for fear of making mistakes.

Theme 4: Coping strategies and self-regulation

To reduce distraction and manage pressure, learners reported strategies such as creating learning-only accounts, setting short daily goals, using planning tools, and relying on small accountability groups (e.g., WhatsApp study groups). These coping behaviors illustrate active self-regulation in digital learning contexts.

Triangulation (joint display of quantitative and qualitative evidence)

To demonstrate integration of both strands, Table 4 provides a joint display showing how survey patterns converge with interview themes.

Table 4

Joint Display of Survey Results and Interview Theme

Integrated theme	Quantitative evidence (survey)	Qualitative evidence (interviews)
Social media increases exposure and motivation	72.5% used YouTube; 68% reported increased motivation.	Participants reported daily listening practice and feeling inspired by authentic content (e.g., A, D).
Digital distraction is a major barrier	61% reported distraction by non-academic content.	Participants described 'scrolling' beyond learning content and losing time (e.g., B, E).
Register confusion between informal and academic English	47% reported difficulty distinguishing informal vs academic English.	Participants noted uncertainty about which expressions are appropriate for academic tasks (e.g., B, C).
Peer support helps confidence, but comparison can create anxiety	Survey items indicated both supportive collaboration and pressure (see RQ mapping in Table 1).	Participants described encouragement plus fear of making mistakes or 'being left behind' (e.g., D, E, A).

Ethical considerations

This study adhered strictly to ethical standards for educational research and was reviewed and approved by the faculty-level research ethics committee of the affiliated university prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all participants received detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and use of data prior to participation. Informed consent was obtained electronically for the survey and verbally at the beginning of each interview. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. All digital data, including recordings and transcripts, were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researchers. The study posed no physical or psychological risk to participants and complied with ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice (BERA, 2018).

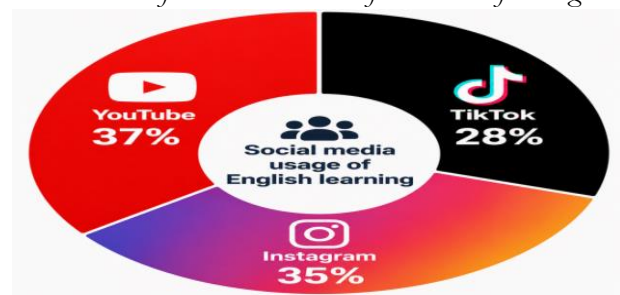
FINDINGS

The findings of this study address the research objectives concerning the roles of social media and peer environments in English language learning, as well as the barriers and coping strategies experienced by learners. Data were obtained from 51 survey respondents and five in-depth interview participants. The results are presented thematically in eight categories: (1) social media usage in English learning, (2) student's perception on social media motivation in English learning, (3) perceived barriers in digital learning, (4) social media as a double-edged tool, (5) opportunities and distractions, (6) peer support: empowerment and pressure, (7) challenges faced by learners in the digital age, and (8) coping strategies and self-regulation.

1. Social media usage in English learning

Figure 1

Distribution of Social Media Platforms Used for English Learning



Survey data indicated that YouTube (37.0%), Instagram (35.0%), and TikTok (28.0%) were the most frequently used social media platforms for English learning with percentages calculated based on the total number of responses rather than the number of participants, as multiple selections were permitted. Students reported using these platforms primarily to develop listening skills, improve pronunciation, and expand vocabulary. Qualitative findings corroborated the survey results, as learners emphasized the accessibility of authentic language input and the motivational value of social media-based learning. One participant noted, “*I use YouTube almost every day to practice listening. It feels like I’m learning from real speakers, not just textbooks*” (Participant A).

2. Students’ perception of social media motivation in English learning

Figure 2

Students’ Perceptions on Social Media Motivation in English Learning

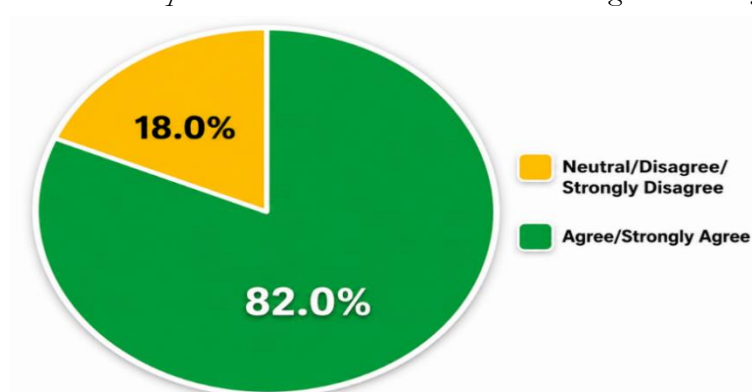
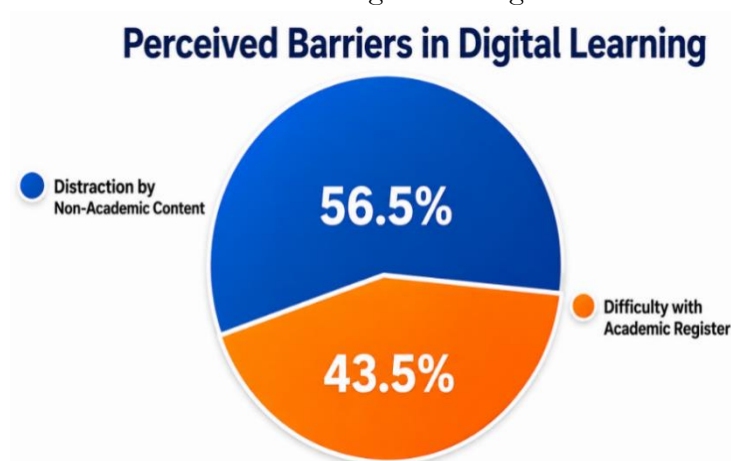


Figure 2 illustrates students’ perceptions of the motivational role of social media in learning English. The results show that most respondents (82%) selected Agree or Strongly Agree, indicating that social media is widely perceived as an effective source of motivation in their English learning process. Meanwhile, 18% of students reported neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree responses, reflecting a smaller group who are either uncertain or do not experience motivational benefits from social media use. Overall, the findings show that a majority of participants reported using social media as part of their English learning practices. In addition, several students reported using social media as a self-assessment tool, such as imitating English-language content, participating in trends, and sharing reflective posts.

3. Perceived barrier in digital learning

Figure 3

Students’ Perceived Barriers in Digital Learning



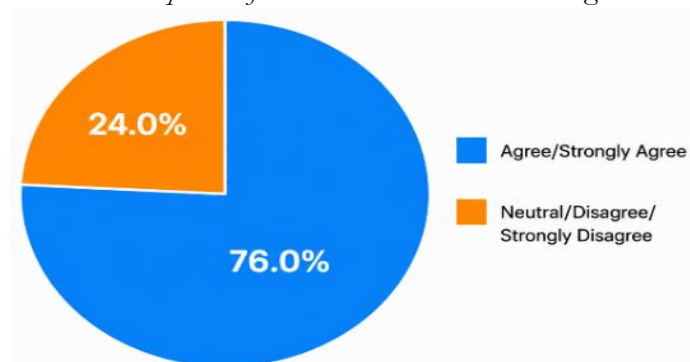
Despite the pedagogical benefits of social media, the findings reveal notable challenges that may hinder effective English learning. A substantial proportion of learners reported being distracted by non-academic content (61%), indicating that the entertainment-oriented nature of social media often disrupts sustained learning focus. In addition, 47% of participants experienced difficulty distinguishing between informal online English and academically appropriate language, suggesting potential risks for learners' academic literacy development.

Qualitative data further elucidated these concerns, as students acknowledged that while social media offers incidental learning opportunities, it simultaneously exposes them to excessive distractions. Participant B stated, *"When I scroll Instagram, sometimes I learn new vocabulary, but most of the time I end up distracted by entertainment posts"*. Overall, these results highlight the need for greater learner awareness and instructional guidance in navigating social media critically and purposefully.

4. Social media as a double-edged tool

Figure 4

Students' Perceptions of Social Media as a Double-Edged Tool in English Learning



The survey findings demonstrate that social media functions as a double-edged tool in students' English learning experiences. A clear majority of respondents (76%) reported that social media increased their motivation to study English. In contrast, 24% of respondents did not report increased motivation, indicating variation in students' experiences when using social media for learning.

Nevertheless, the data also reveals a contrasting and equally important dimension. Several participants reported that excessive use of social media reduced their study efficiency. Participants reported difficulties in maintaining focus, managing time effectively, and prioritizing academic tasks due to the highly distracting nature of social media platforms. This tension is captured in one interviewee's statement: *"Social media gives me inspiration, but sometimes I spend too much time scrolling instead of finishing my assignments"* (Participant D). Overall, the findings show that students experienced both positive and negative effects when using social media for English learning.

5. Opportunities and distractions

Students acknowledged that social media offers substantial learning opportunities, particularly in providing access to authentic English input, cultural insights, and interactive learning spaces. Several participants reported that short videos, language tips, and peer-shared content enabled them to engage with English beyond the classroom in flexible and personalized ways. However, these potentials were consistently accompanied by significant distractions, creating a learning experience.

As one participant noted, *"Sometimes I learn a lot, but other times I lose time scrolling. It's a love-hate thing"* (Participant C). Others described how algorithm-driven content blurred the boundary between learning and entertainment. For instance, Participant E stated, *"You come for English tips, but stay for memes, and before you know it, an hour is gone,"* while Participant B added, *"Some accounts share both learning tips and humor, and it's hard to tell when I've shifted from learning to laughing."* Beyond time-related distraction, emotional consequences—particularly social comparison—emerged as a dominant theme. Participant A reflected, *"Seeing others' success makes me feel behind. It's hard not to compare."* Such comparisons often led

students to perceive their own progress as insufficient, especially when juxtaposed with curated representations of fluency and achievement online. Several participants reported experiencing anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and internalized pressure when their learning trajectories did not align with the performances displayed on social media.

In addition, participants expressed difficulty in identifying credible and pedagogically sound content amid the vast volume of available posts. The absence of clear curation mechanisms and the prevalence of entertainment-oriented material diluted learners' academic focus and contributed to cognitive overload. The findings show that participants reported increased engagement and a sense of learning community, whereas others reported challenges related to procrastination, emotional strain, and self-regulation.

6. Peer support: Empowerment and pressure

Peer support emerged as a double-edged phenomenon in students' English learning experiences. While many participants reported gaining encouragement, guidance, and increased confidence through interactions with peers, others experienced feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and performance anxiety, particularly when comparing their progress to more fluent or socially active peers.

Several participants highlighted the empowering role of peer interaction. Participant D stated, *"I feel encouraged when a friend helps me with pronunciation,"* However, not all experiences were positive. Some participants perceived peer interaction as a source of pressure that limited their willingness to communicate. Participant E noted, *"Sometimes I avoid speaking in group chats because I'm afraid of sounding wrong,"* while Participant B reported feeling discouraged when comparing their abilities with more fluent peers. Overall, participants reported both supportive and pressuring experiences in peer interaction.

7. Challenges faced by learners in the digital age

Interview and questionnaire data revealed that learners face multiple challenges in the digital age that extend beyond surface-level distraction. Participants reported difficulties related to self-discipline, time management, screen fatigue, and sustaining consistent learning routines. Many admitted that their daily engagement with social media often began and ended with passive scrolling, leaving limited space for intentional and goal-oriented English learning.

Several participants described their struggles with regulating screen time and maintaining focus. As Participant A noted, *"I installed a focus app because I couldn't control my screen time."* Others emphasized structural challenges in collaborative learning contexts. Participant B explained, *"Group learning is helpful, but it's hard to schedule consistently."* In addition, cognitive exhaustion emerged as a recurrent concern. Participant D reflected, *"After online classes, I'm too tired to scroll again for learning. My brain is drained."*

Procrastination also surfaced as a significant barrier to sustained learning. As Participant E admitted, *"I know what I need to study, but I often delay and say 'later'. That later sometimes never comes."* Furthermore, participants expressed frustration with algorithm-driven content that frequently diverted attention away from learning goals. The absence of clear structure and guidance within digital learning spaces contributed to feelings of confusion and fragmented engagement. Overall, participants reported multiple challenges related to maintaining focus, managing time, and sustaining consistent learning in digital environments.

8. Coping strategies and self-regulation

To cope with digital and social pressures, students adopted a range of self-regulatory strategies aimed at maintaining learning focus and consistency. These strategies included content filtering, scheduled digital detox periods, personalized goal setting, and peer accountability mechanisms.

Several participants described intentional efforts to curate their digital environments to support learning. Participant C explained, *"I created a second Instagram account just for English learning content."* illustrating how selective exposure was used to minimize distraction. Others emphasized the role of

structured peer support in maintaining commitment. As Participant D noted, *"We made a small WhatsApp group to discuss English once a week."* Time management tools also played a crucial role. Participant B reported, *"I use Google Calendar to plan my learning hours, even if it's just 15 minutes."*

In addition, some learners adopted reflective and motivational practices to monitor progress. Participant A shared, *"Every time I complete a goal, like watching an English podcast fully, I post about it to track progress."* Beyond consumption-based learning, several participants engaged in productive language use by creating their own English content through captions, short reflections, daily storytelling, or online challenges. Overall, participants reported using various strategies to manage learning focus, time, and engagement in digital environments.

DISCUSSION

The first major finding indicates that social media platforms, particularly YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, have become integral tools for English learning. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the role of social media in supporting informal and autonomous language learning through exposure to authentic content and repeated practice (Saeed, 2021; Figueiredo, 2023). Recent studies have further emphasized that such platforms function as informal learning ecologies where learners regulate pace, content, and intensity of engagement (Inayati et al., 2024). This study also indicates that learners engage with social media not only for linguistic development but also for cultural learning and identity-related engagement, although the extent of this engagement may vary across individuals. While prior research has often focused on skill acquisition, these findings suggest a broader sociocultural dimension of engagement. This pattern reflects the increasing integration of digital environments into language learning practices, supporting sociocultural perspectives on language learning that view identity and participation as central to development (Norton, 2013; Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Another important finding concerns the prevalence of digital distraction during social media-based learning. While social media offers flexibility and accessibility, the findings indicate that a substantial proportion of learners struggle with maintaining focus and regulating their learning behavior. This supports Aliyah's (2023) findings that frequent exposure to entertainment-oriented content weakens learners' attention span. Furthermore, Stamenkovic and Nikovic (2023) argues that algorithm-driven platforms intensify cognitive overload by encouraging passive consumption rather than goal-directed learning. This concern is echoed by Firth et al. (2019), who argue that excessive digital multitasking can negatively affect sustained attention and cognitive control. The findings also suggest that distraction is not solely a technical issue but is associated with learners' self-regulation and emotional responses, although further investigation is needed to clarify this relationship. This points to the importance of viewing digital distraction as both a technological and pedagogical concern, requiring structured guidance and scaffolding, particularly in fostering metacognitive awareness and self-monitoring skills (Panadero, 2017).

Despite its benefits, the findings reveal that learners faced notable barriers in digital learning. Distraction by entertainment content and difficulty distinguishing informal from academic English were among the most frequently mentioned issues. These findings align with Abidin (2023), who reported that social media often disrupts learners' concentration, and with Aulia and Syahrul (2026) who emphasized risks of linguistic inaccuracies in online communication. Similar concerns have been raised by Godwin-Jones (2018), who cautioned that informal digital input may blur linguistic norms if not critically mediated. The findings further indicate that these barriers are closely associated with learners' challenges in self-regulation. This suggests that while learners have access to rich resources, managing attention and focus remains a key challenge, particularly in environments that lack explicit instructional structure.

The dual nature of social media emerged as a strong theme in this study. On one hand, learners felt more motivated and inspired to study English, echoing Reinhardt's (2019) concept of "potentials and constraints." On the other hand, excessive use of social media reduced study efficiency and encouraged procrastination. This paradox resonates with Hussin et al. (2025) and Uzcátegui-Sánchez

et al. (2025) who also noted that digital tools can simultaneously empower and hinder learning. Participants' accounts illustrate this ambivalence, suggesting awareness of both benefits and drawbacks. These findings indicate that opportunities and distractions are closely intertwined in digital learning environments. While students appreciated the cultural insights and authentic English input available on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, they also reported being pulled into prolonged scrolling sessions. This echoes Gao et al. (2025), who found that digital environments can foster both creativity and procrastination. Participant C's reflection on gaining quick lessons from TikTok but losing time in non-academic browsing underscores this duality. This highlights the importance of incorporating self-regulation as a central component of digital language learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Peer environments were found to have a dual impact on learners' engagement. Positive peer influence included motivation, encouragement, and reduced anxiety, consistent with the findings of Pyle et al. (2017) and Cole (2018). Learners reported that practicing with peers reduced their fear of making mistakes, illustrating the social dimension of language learning. Conversely, learners also experienced peer-related pressure, particularly from social comparison and competition. Some learners reported feelings of inferiority linked to differences in access and proficiency, highlighting potential inequities that can emerge within collaborative contexts. These findings are consistent with prior research (Plenty & Mood, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2023), while also indicating that empowerment and pressure may coexist within the same peer environment, creating a complex emotional dynamic that shapes learners' self-efficacy. This underscores the need for recent calls to design peer learning activities that prioritize psychological safety and inclusive participation (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Beyond individual experiences, the study identified systemic challenges, such as unequal internet connectivity, device limitations, and information overload. These challenges reaffirm earlier findings on the digital divide (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Shao et al., 2024), but in this study, they are directly linked to English language learning outcomes.

Learners demonstrated resilience by developing coping strategies such as selective content use, creating learning-only accounts, muting notifications, and joining peer study sessions for accountability. These practices align with models of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002) and confirm findings by Gao et al. (2025), who emphasized the role of resilience in digital contexts. Some learners reported creating separate accounts dedicated to learning, indicating adaptive strategies for managing digital environments. These strategies reflect aspects of adaptive self-regulation and environmental structuring (Hadwin et al., 2018). However, not all learners may have the resources or skills to implement such strategies effectively, suggesting uneven capacity for self-regulated learning.

Overall, the findings highlight how social media and peer environments jointly shape English learning in complex ways. The results confirm prior studies regarding the motivational benefits and risks of social media, as well as the supportive yet pressuring role of peer groups. In addition, the findings suggest that learners are aware of the dual nature of these environments and adopt various strategies to manage them. These findings point to the importance of integrating digital literacy and peer-support frameworks into English instruction while also addressing infrastructural inequalities that may affect access and participation. The novelty of this research lies in its combined focus on social media and peer environments as interconnected forces that influence learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and resilience in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how social media and peer environments shape English language learning experiences. The findings show that social media and peer interactions function as interconnected influences that both support and challenge learning. They are associated with increased motivation and access to authentic input, but also with distraction, emotional pressure, and challenges in self-regulation. The findings also indicate that learners employ various strategies, such as selective content use and peer support, to manage these challenges. These results highlight the coexistence of opportunities and constraints in digital language learning environments. Pedagogically, this suggests

the importance of integrating digital literacy, self-regulation support, and structured peer collaboration into English language teaching. This study is limited by its small qualitative sample, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on a single context. Future research could involve more diverse samples and examine the impact of structured digital and peer-based learning interventions. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of recognizing digital and peer environments as integral components of contemporary English language learning.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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