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Research Article

Exploring Opportunities in Using Digital Platforms for English Language Learning among Vocational Students in Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates vocational students' perceptions of the opportunities offered by digital platforms in English language learning. The research responds to the increasing role of educational technology in the post-pandemic era and the need to evaluate its pedagogical impact on vocational education contexts. A quantitative descriptive design was employed, involving 61 students from the Broadcasting and Culinary programs at SMK Negeri 3 Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Data were collected through a 21-item Likert-scale questionnaire (Cronbach's α = 0.825). The results show that students hold a moderately positive perception of the opportunities provided by digital platforms (M = 3.27, SD = 0.684). The highest mean scores were recorded in listening (M = 3.49), grammar (M = 3.46), and writing (M = 3.39), indicating that digital tools effectively enhance these language competencies. The findings highlight the potential of digital platforms to support flexible, autonomous, and interactive English learning. However, their full potential is yet to be realized due to limited teacher facilitation and technological barriers. The study recommends strengthening digital pedagogy training for vocational teachers and integrating digital literacy into English curricula to optimize the benefits of technology in language education.

Keywords: *Digital Platforms; English Language Learning; Opportunities; Students' Perception; Vocational Education.*

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1. Introduction

Technological advancement has transformed education in the twenty-first century, changing how knowledge is delivered and acquired. In English language learning (ELL), digital platforms have become essential tools that enable flexible, interactive, and self-directed learning. Applications such as Duolingo, YouTube, and Google Classroom allow students to access authentic materials, receive instant feedback, and practice independently. Godwin-Jones (2018) highlighted that technology enhances motivation, autonomy, and exposure to real communication. As education evolves, the ability to use these tools effectively has become crucial for improving the quality of learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in education, including in Indonesia. When schools closed, digital platforms became the primary medium of instruction (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). After the return to face-to-face learning, many schools continued using digital tools, creating hybrid learning environments. This transformation has made it important to examine how students perceive the value and benefits of digital platforms, especially in English learning.

Within Indonesia's education system, vocational high schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* or SMK) play a distinct role in preparing students for professional work. They

are required to balance academic knowledge and vocational skills relevant to industry. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud, 2023), vocational education aims to produce graduates who are competent, creative, and digitally literate. English proficiency supports these goals by strengthening students' employability and communication in international settings. Digital platforms can facilitate English instruction by providing access to field-specific materials such as business correspondence, technical documents, or hospitality conversations. Hartono and Dewi (2024) noted that digital literacy is a key skill for the modern workforce, and vocational students need it to adapt to industry demands.

However, many vocational schools still rely on traditional, teacher-centered instruction with limited integration of technology (Kusuma, 2022). Infrastructure, internet access, and teacher competence vary widely among regions (Gusti, 2024). Puspasari, Utami, and Budiarta (2023) found that many teachers used technology merely as a supporting medium rather than an integral part of instructional design. For vocational students whose focus includes practical application, it is essential to understand how they perceive the learning opportunities provided by digital tools.

Students' perceptions are a key factor influencing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Positive attitudes toward technology use can strengthen self-efficacy and participation (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). In the context of vocational education, students' perceptions are particularly important because their learning objectives are closely linked to professional and technical competence. Exploring their perceptions of digital platforms can help determine whether these tools align with their learning styles, career needs, and expectations.

Although research on technology integration in language education has increased, most studies have focused on universities or general high schools (Elisa, 2023; Wang & Derakhshan, 2024). Research in vocational contexts remains limited, despite the unique challenges related to infrastructure, teacher readiness, and student characteristics. Previous studies have also tended to emphasize challenges rather than opportunities. This gap limits understanding of how digital platforms can actually promote innovation, creativity, and communication in English learning. There is a need for studies that focus on the positive aspects of technology and identify which language skills benefit most from digital learning.

Therefore, this study investigates vocational students' perceptions of the opportunities offered by digital platforms in English language learning at SMK Negeri 3 Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The focus is on identifying which language skills, such as listening, writing, grammar, and vocabulary, are most supported by technology. By highlighting opportunities rather than barriers, this research contributes to a balanced understanding of digital transformation in vocational education. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in optimizing digital learning to enhance English proficiency and digital literacy among vocational students.

2. Method

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive design to examine vocational students' perceptions of the opportunities provided by digital platforms in English language learning. This design was considered suitable because it allows researchers to describe and interpret a phenomenon objectively without manipulating any variables. The purpose was to identify how students perceive the role of technology in enhancing their English language skills and to determine which aspects of learning are most

supported by digital tools. According to Creswell (2012), descriptive quantitative research helps reveal patterns and tendencies in educational contexts that can guide the development of effective instructional strategies.

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 3 Pekanbaru, a state vocational high school located in Riau Province, Indonesia. The school was selected because it represents a typical vocational institution that integrates technology into English instruction but still faces challenges in optimizing its use. Participants consisted of 61 eleventh-grade students from the Broadcasting and Culinary programs who were taking English courses in the 2024–2025 academic year. All participants were involved through total sampling to ensure comprehensive data coverage. This approach was appropriate because the population was relatively small and homogeneous in age and educational background, allowing the researcher to capture the full range of perceptions within the target group.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was adapted from previous studies on technology-enhanced language learning (Masykuri & Basuki, 2022). The instrument contained 21 items categorized into two dimensions: challenges and opportunities. However, this study focused solely on the items related to opportunities. Each statement was rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scale was selected to encourage participants to provide clear opinions rather than neutral responses. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in English education to ensure validity, and a pilot test was conducted with ten students from a similar school. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained from the pilot test was 0.825, indicating high reliability and internal consistency of the instrument.

Data collection took place during regular English classes with prior permission from the school administration and English teachers. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, ensured confidentiality, and informed participants that their involvement was voluntary. Students completed the questionnaire individually within approximately twenty minutes. After data collection, all responses were checked for completeness, coded, and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each item. The interpretation followed the criteria adapted from Katz and Kahn (1978), where scores of 1.00–1.49 represented a low perception, 1.50–2.49 a moderate-low perception, 2.50–3.49 a moderate perception, and 3.50–4.00 a high perception. The results were then interpreted qualitatively to identify which aspects of English language learning students perceived as most improved by digital platforms. These findings provided the foundation for discussion and pedagogical interpretation in the next section.

3. Result

The results of this study describe vocational students' perceptions of the opportunities offered by digital platforms in English language learning. Data obtained from 61 participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each indicator. The analysis aimed to identify which aspects of English language learning were perceived as most enhanced by the use of digital tools. Table 1 summarizes the overall findings.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Opportunities in Digital Platform Use (n = 61).

Indicator	Mean	SD	Category
Grammar competence	3.46	0.62	Moderate
Listening skills	3.49	0.65	Moderate

Communication skills	3.25	0.65	Moderate
Reading skills	3.28	0.66	Moderate
Writing skills	3.39	0.74	Moderate
Vocabulary development	3.16	0.73	Moderate
Learning enjoyment	3.23	0.74	Moderate
Ease of learning	3.28	0.71	Moderate
Overall Mean	**3.27**	**0.68**	**Moderate**

To illustrate the distribution of students' perceptions across indicators, Figure 1 presents a simple visualization of the mean scores. The graphic shows that the highest perceived opportunities were related to listening and grammar, followed by writing, while vocabulary received the lowest mean score.

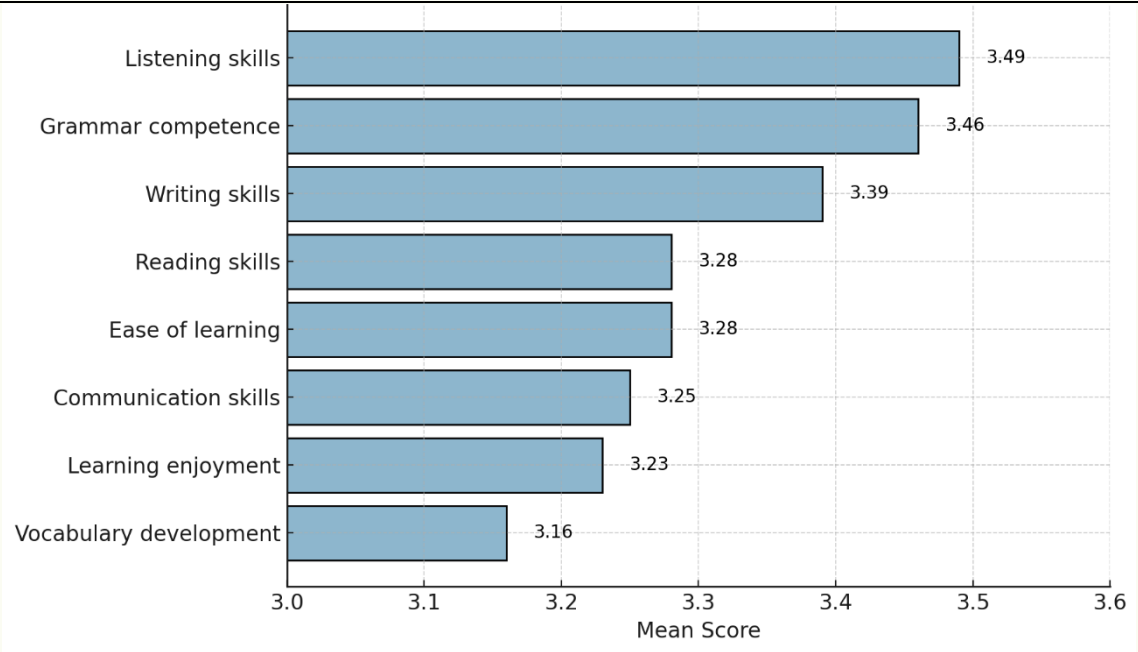

Figure 1. Mean Scores of Perceived Learning Opportunities

The results show that students held a moderately positive perception of the opportunities offered by digital platforms, with an overall mean score of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.68. This value falls within the "moderate" category, which indicates that students generally viewed digital learning tools as beneficial, although there is still potential for improvement. The relatively small standard deviations suggest that responses were consistent across participants, meaning that most students shared similar views about the usefulness of digital platforms.

Among the specific indicators, listening skills received the highest mean score (M = 3.49, SD = 0.65). This suggests that digital platforms are particularly effective for improving listening comprehension, likely because they provide access to diverse audio materials, such as podcasts, video tutorials, and interactive exercises. Grammar competence followed closely (M = 3.46, SD = 0.62), reflecting that students benefited from automated feedback features available in applications such as Grammarly or Google Docs. Writing skills also showed a relatively high mean score (M = 3.39, SD =

0.74), indicating that digital platforms helped students structure their ideas and improve accuracy in written expression.

On the other hand, vocabulary development recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.16, SD = 0.73). This implies that although digital tools are useful for exposure to new words, they may not always facilitate long-term retention or contextual understanding. Students might still rely on traditional learning methods, such as note-taking or translation exercises, to build vocabulary. Similarly, communication skills, learning enjoyment, and ease of learning all received moderate ratings, suggesting that digital platforms provide adequate support but are not yet fully integrated into classroom interaction or speaking practice.

Overall, the data reveal that vocational students perceive digital platforms as valuable tools for improving their English language abilities, particularly in receptive and productive skills such as listening, grammar, and writing. The findings also suggest that while students appreciate the flexibility and accessibility of digital learning, there remains a need for more interactive and engaging approaches to vocabulary and communication development. These results highlight the pedagogical significance of digital platforms in language education and provide the foundation for the following discussion, which relates these findings to existing literature and educational practice.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that vocational students perceive digital platforms as valuable tools for developing their English language abilities. The overall mean score of 3.27 suggests that students hold moderately positive views about the opportunities provided by these platforms. This perception reflects a growing recognition of the benefits of technology in supporting flexible and self-paced learning. The result aligns with the findings of Nugroho and Triana (2021), who revealed that informal digital learning beyond the classroom fosters learner autonomy, authentic language exposure, and motivation among Indonesian EFL learners. Similar studies by Elisa (2023) and Wang and Derakhshan (2024) also confirmed that the integration of technology strengthens engagement and autonomy in language classrooms. These consistencies suggest that vocational students, like their academic counterparts, view digital platforms as an effective medium to bridge formal learning and real-world communication.

The highest mean score was observed for listening skills (M = 3.49), indicating that digital platforms play a major role in improving learners' comprehension of spoken English. This finding can be interpreted through Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level. By using platforms such as YouTube, BBC Learning English, or English Central, students are exposed to diverse accents, authentic pronunciation, and contextual usage that traditional textbooks may not provide. This result is consistent with Ate, Anuno, and Muliani (2025), who found that self-directed learning through YouTube substantially enhances students' listening comprehension and promotes learner autonomy. Similarly, Lestari et al. (2023) confirmed that YouTube serves as an effective medium for optimizing students' listening comprehension through authentic and engaging auditory input. The prominence of listening as the most enhanced skill in this study therefore reflects the value of digital resources in delivering abundant linguistic input through audio and video.

Grammar competence ranked second (M = 3.46), showing that digital platforms help students identify and correct language forms more efficiently. Applications such as Grammarly or Google Docs provide instant feedback on grammatical errors, allowing

learners to develop accuracy and self-correction habits. This aligns with the communicative competence model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), which highlights grammatical knowledge as a core component of effective communication. In addition, the interactive feedback system built into digital writing tools promotes autonomous learning, enabling students to review their errors without depending solely on teacher correction. Writing skills also received relatively high mean scores (M = 3.39), suggesting that online learning environments encourage more writing practice and experimentation. Hyland (2003) found that digital writing tasks allow students to focus on organization, coherence, and style, which supports the finding that digital environments can improve writing fluency and confidence.

Meanwhile, vocabulary development obtained the lowest mean score (M = 3.16). This suggests that while students can access new words through online exposure, they may not always internalize or apply them effectively. Vocabulary learning often requires repeated encounters and contextual use, which may not be adequately supported by many digital tools. This aligns with the observation by Puspasari, Utami, and Budiarta (2023), who noted that Indonesian EFL students often rely on direct translation rather than contextualized vocabulary learning due to limited teacher guidance and interaction in online classes. To improve this aspect, teachers could integrate digital games, online glossaries, or context-based vocabulary applications that encourage active use rather than passive recognition. Learning enjoyment and ease of learning also recorded moderate ratings, implying that while students enjoy using digital platforms, their experience might be limited by factors such as internet access, teacher guidance, or the design of digital content.

Another notable finding is that digital platforms contributed more effectively to receptive (listening and reading) and productive (writing and grammar) skills than to communicative and vocabulary development. This pattern may result from the design of most digital learning materials, which emphasize comprehension and accuracy rather than spontaneous communication. Basturkmen (2019) highlighted that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational education should emphasize communicative competence in workplace contexts. Therefore, integrating tasks that simulate real-life professional communication through digital media could help vocational students strengthen their speaking and interaction skills. For example, role-playing simulations, virtual interviews, or online collaboration projects can transform digital learning from a passive to an interactive experience.

The moderate overall perception also indicates that technological opportunities have not yet reached their full potential. This may be influenced by external constraints such as teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and digital literacy. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) emphasized that the success of online learning depends not only on technological access but also on pedagogical design and instructor competence. Many vocational schools in Indonesia still face unequal access to devices and unstable internet connections, particularly outside urban centers. Hartono and Dewi (2024) found that disparities in digital literacy among students and teachers remain a major obstacle to optimizing technology in vocational education. Hence, although students recognize the benefits of digital platforms, their experiences are shaped by contextual and institutional limitations.

These findings also highlight the importance of aligning digital tools with the vocational curriculum. The primary goal of SMK students is to develop English proficiency relevant to their future professions, such as customer service, broadcasting, or hospitality communication. When digital learning content connects directly to these domains, it becomes more meaningful and motivating. Prayoga, Irwansyah, and Harya (2021) emphasized that English materials designed for specific vocational fields increase

students' engagement and motivation because they directly relate to real professional contexts.

Teachers, therefore, need to select or design digital resources that reflect professional communication tasks rather than generic exercises. For instance, broadcasting students could use video editing platforms for English news reporting, while culinary students might use recipe blogs or instructional videos in English to practice language use in context.

In summary, the discussion reveals that vocational students' moderately positive perceptions of digital platforms are consistent with international findings but are influenced by contextual realities in Indonesian vocational schools. The study supports the theoretical argument that technology enhances learner autonomy and motivation but also calls for targeted improvements in pedagogy and infrastructure. Digital platforms are not a substitute for teachers but a complement that requires careful integration into teaching practices. As Hyland (2003) and Wang and Derakhshan (2024) emphasized, technology becomes most effective when it is combined with meaningful interaction, teacher support, and learner reflection. Future implementation should focus on training teachers in digital pedagogy, improving access to learning technologies, and designing context-specific materials that connect vocational English learning with real-world professional needs.

5. Conclusion

This study explored vocational students' perceptions of opportunities in using digital platforms for English language learning in Pekanbaru. The overall findings reveal that students hold moderately positive views toward the use of digital technologies, particularly in developing receptive and productive skills such as listening, grammar, and writing. Among the indicators, listening received the highest mean score, suggesting that multimedia input plays an essential role in improving comprehension and exposure to authentic English usage. Conversely, vocabulary development was identified as the weakest area, reflecting students' limited ability to contextualize new words and their tendency to rely on direct translation.

These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital tools that foster interactive and context-based learning, rather than treating technology as a mere supplement. Teachers are encouraged to design learning activities using platforms such as YouTube, BBC Learning English, or interactive vocabulary applications that promote active use and learner engagement.

Future studies may extend this investigation by involving larger and more diverse samples or by applying mixed-method approaches to explore how digital learning behaviors shape students' long-term language proficiency and motivation in vocational education settings.

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