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Integrating Digital Literacy in EFL Learning: A Qualitative Study on Vocational Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed educational practices and increased the importance of integrating digital literacy into classroom learning. In vocational high schools, having digital skills is not just important for doing well in school, but also for getting ready for jobs in today's workforce. In this study, digital literacy is conceptualized through three interrelated dimensions including information literacy, media literacy, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy which is consistent with the theoretical framework used to analyze the data. However, research on digital literacy in vocational EFL contexts remains limited, as prior studies have mostly examined university students or teachers rather than vocational learners themselves. This study addresses that gap by examining how vocational high school students perceive the integration of digital literacy in EFL learning. Using a qualitative study supported by descriptive questionnaire data, the research involved 33 eleventh-grade Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) students who completed a questionnaire, four of whom were purposively selected for in-depth interviews based on the richness of their open-ended responses. The findings show that students generally hold positive attitudes toward digital literacy, frequently using social media and AI tools to support autonomous English learning and to meet vocational needs such as operating computers and interpreting technical content. However, a discrepancy emerged between students' reported ability to access digital information and their actual practices of

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critically evaluating it. Beyond its academic value, digital literacy in this vocational context was closely tied to students' professional identity and employability. The study suggests that EFL educators should build on students' existing digital habits while explicitly teaching critical source-evaluation strategies to help vocational learners become critically informed and digitally competent professionals.

1. Introduction

Digital literacy has become an essential competence in language education, encompassing not only operational skills but also the capacity to critically evaluate, communicate, and create information through digital tools (Mardiah, 2022). This study examines digital literacy through Trilling & Fadel's (2009) framework, which conceptualizes digital literacy along three interconnected dimensions: information literacy, media literacy, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy.

This framework is used as the primary analytical lens because it directly captures the three dimensions of students' digital practices explored in this study; it is complemented, as broader contemporary background, by the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.2), which describes digital competence as a set of abilities necessary for both active participation in society and lifetime learning, including information and data literacy, communication and teamwork, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving abilities (Vuorikan, Kluzer, & Punie, 2022). Together, these perspectives underscore that digital literacy is central to preparing learners for the demands of Society 5.0, which requires critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills (A. Rahman, Al-Qasri, & Ofara, 2023).

In English language instruction specifically, digital literacy fosters collaborative learning, increases students' involvement with real resources, and contributes in the simultaneous development of their linguistic and technology competency (Sahiruddin, Sudarwati, Lestari, & Daniswara, 2025). Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) has further strengthened this connection by providing instructors with innovative tools to create more engaging and interactive EFL environments (Harapah, Lubis, & Hidayani, 2025). More recently, artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to reshape this landscape, opening new avenues for developing learners' language proficiency through adaptive, technology-mediated practice (Anggarini, Hidayat, & Pratama, 2025).

In Indonesia, the integration of digital literacy in education has been prioritized through various national programs aimed at equipping students with the skills necessary for the digital workforce. This is particularly relevant for

vocational high schools (VHS), where English learning is expected to not only develop communicative competence but also align with students' professional and technological readiness (Rodliyah, 2018). Recent studies demonstrate that digital technologies support vocational students in developing English communication skills relevant to workplace contexts (A. S. Rahman & Unsiah, 2025). However, despite the growing importance of technology in EFL learning, studies focusing on digital literacy within the vocational education context remain limited. Most prior studies have examined university students, such as Pertiwi & Rodliyah (2022), who found that university students recognized the value of digital tools for English learning but often lacked critical awareness in using digital resources effectively.

Other studies have focused on teachers rather than students: Kurniawati, Maolida, & Anjaniputra (2018) found that teachers' digital competence and attitudes shape how digital literacy is practiced in EFL classrooms; Qulub & Budiyono (2021) found that teachers' digital literacy positively affects the quality of online learning in vocational schools; and Maharani & Hidayat (2025)found that teachers' beliefs about technology integration influence how confidently digital tools are incorporated into instruction. Son, Park, & Park (2017) examined language learners' digital literacy in Australia and Korea, finding strong ICT operational competence but limitations in critically evaluating and creating digital content. Similarly, Wang (2022) found that in higher vocational colleges in China, digital literacy education needs to align with professional training and employability.

This body of research points to a population and context gap: existing studies have concentrated on university students or teachers, while vocational high school students' own perspectives remain underexplored. Beyond this contextual gap, a conceptual gap is also evident: little research has examined how vocational learners connect digital literacy, EFL learning, informal digital practices, and career-specific technological needs within a single account. Digital literacy is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct extending beyond operational ICT skills to include critical thinking, communication, and meaningful application of digital technologies (Falloon, 2020). yet how vocational students themselves experience and integrate these dimensions in relation to their future occupational identity has rarely been investigated.

Pertiwi & Rodliyah (2022) applied a similar framework of information, media, and ICT literacy to investigate how university students understood the integration of digital literacy in EFL instruction, finding that students generally recognized the value of digital tools for enhancing their English learning. However, because their participants were university students, their learning environment and digital exposure differ substantially from those of vocational high school students, whose digital literacy development is more directly tied to occupational and technical demands.

The present study extends this line of inquiry by focusing on vocational high school students, who are required to develop not only linguistic and academic skills

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but also career-oriented digital competencies relevant to their professional fields. This shift in context matters because vocational students often engage with technology for practical, job-related purposes, linking their digital literacy development directly to employability and real-world application. By examining vocational students' digital literacy from their own perspectives, this study offers a deeper understanding of how digital literacy is integrated into EFL learning to support both language development and career readiness. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are vocational high school students' perspectives on the advantages and limitations of using digital technology when learning EFL?
2. How do vocational students perceive the contribution of digital technology to their English learning and vocational preparation?

By foregrounding vocational identity and career-oriented digital literacy, this study contributes a perspective that goes beyond simply extending prior research to a new participant group: it highlights how English and digital competence intersect with students' technical training and future employability, an aspect that has received little attention in existing EFL digital-literacy research.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitatively driven design in which a descriptive questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used sequentially to explore vocational students' perspectives on digital literacy in EFL learning. Following Creswell (2009), qualitative research involves exploring a phenomenon through open-ended data, purposeful sampling, and inductive analysis. This study used questionnaire responses, including descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean scores, were used primarily to map students' technology use and self-perceived competence and to inform the purposive selection and focus of the subsequent interviews, while the interviews and their thematic analysis constitute the primary source of interpretive, qualitative evidence. This qualitatively driven, questionnaire-supported design allows the study to combine a broad descriptive picture of the participant group with an in-depth understanding of individual experiences.

Participants were 33 eleventh-grade students majoring in Computer and Network Engineering (Teknik Komputer dan Jaringan, henceforth TKJ) at a vocational high school in Malang, Indonesia. Data were collected through a five-section questionnaire adapted from Son et al. (2017). The questionnaire comprised 34 substantive items, in addition to participant-profile questions. It included frequency-based response items, multiple-response items, scaled self-assessment items, and open-ended questions. The first section collected participants' profiles and technology-use patterns, including six items measuring the frequency of using digital devices and accessing the internet for English learning, as well as multiple-response items concerning digital tools and learning activities used by participants.

The second section addressed information literacy through three self-assessment items using a four-point scale ranging from Poor to Advanced. The third section addressed ICT and media literacy through 17 self-assessment items using a five-point scale ranging from Very Poor to Excellent. The fourth section explored the benefits and difficulties encountered when using digital tools through three open-ended questions, while the fifth section addressed students' views on digital literacy in English learning through three additional open-ended questions. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesian to facilitate participants' comprehension and was adapted from Son et al. (2017) to suit the context of English learning among vocational high school students. The translated and adapted version was administered through Google Forms.

To avoid conflating distinct constructs, the questionnaire distinguished between (a) frequency of technology use, (b) self-perceived digital competence, (c) attitudes toward digital tools, and (d) perceived benefits and constraints, rather than treating frequency of use as a proxy for competence. A consent statement at the beginning of the Google Form informed participants that their responses would be used only for academic purposes and that completing the form constituted voluntary participation. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the participating school prior to data collection. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and the study received ethical approval from the researchers' home university.

Following the questionnaire, four students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews based on the richness and reflectiveness of their open-ended responses in the fifth section of the questionnaire; to protect their anonymity, they are referred to by the pseudonyms P1, P2, P3, and P4. Because this selection strategy favors participants who were already highly reflective and digitally aware, it may underrepresent the experiences of students who face greater difficulties with digital literacy; this is acknowledged as a limitation of the sampling approach, and a maximum-variation strategy that also includes students with lower self-reported literacy could offer a broader range of perspectives in future research. The semi-structured interviews addressed five areas: participants' general feelings about using technology and digital media for language learning; the perceived impact of digital literacy on language acquisition; media, information, and ICT literacy; and the benefits and difficulties of using digital technology to learn English. Each interview lasted approximately 20-40 minutes and was conducted online through Google Meet. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives comfortably and in detail. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded on a computer and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Questionnaire and interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure of Braun & Clarke (2006), comprising six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The open-ended questionnaire

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responses and interview transcripts were coded separately to preserve the distinct characteristics of each dataset. The themes generated from the two datasets were subsequently compared to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence. Descriptive questionnaire statistics were used to contextualize, and, where relevant, to corroborate or complicate, the themes generated from the interview data.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing the relevant interview interpretations with participants to confirm whether they accurately represented their intended meanings. Interview excerpts presented in the Results are quoted as spoken by participants, where necessary for clarity they have been lightly edited while preserving their original meaning. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian, and relevant excerpts were translated into English for presentation in this article. The translations were checked against the original Indonesian transcripts to preserve the intended meaning and contextual nuances of participants' statements.

3. Result

Based on the research objectives concerning vocational students' digital literacy in EFL learning, the findings are organized into four themes generated from the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data: (a) digital access and platform preferences, (b) autonomous and informal English learning, (c) vocational relevance of English and technology, and (d) critical evaluation and environmental constraints. Table 1 summarizes how the questionnaire and interview evidence contributed to each theme; each theme is then discussed in turn.

Table 1. Summary of Themes, Evidence, and Interpretation

Theme	Questionnaire evidence	Interview evidence	Interpretation
Digital access and platform preferences	Mobile phones the most-used device (20/33); social media 84.8%, instant messaging and YouTube 66.7% each; web search 78.8%; information-literacy self-ratings 69.7–75.8%	P1–P4 describe daily reliance on smartphones and apps such as Gemini, Blackbox, and Duolingo	Students have broad, comfortable access to digital tools, which provides frequent opportunities to practice literacy skills
Autonomous and informal	High self-rated information-retrieval	P1: "happy because I can understand it	Digital tools function as

English learning	ability (75.8%); frequent search-engine and social-media use	faster"; P2 uses Gemini/Blackbox; P3 uses Duolingo for structured practice	accessible, self-directed, just-in-time learning support
Vocational relevance of English and technology	YouTube used by 66.7%; strong ICT/media literacy averages (e.g., email 4.1)	P1/P2 link English to operating computers; P3 uses YouTube tutorials to learn tool functions	English and digital literacy are tied to students' vocational/technical identity, not only academic performance
Critical evaluation and environmental constraints	69.7% report being able to evaluate information credibility	P3/P4 describe inconsistent verification; P1 admits skipping checks when unmotivated; distraction, small screens, and slow internet reported	A gap exists between perceived and consistently applied critical-evaluation practice, shaped by motivation and environmental constraints

Digital Access and Platform Preferences

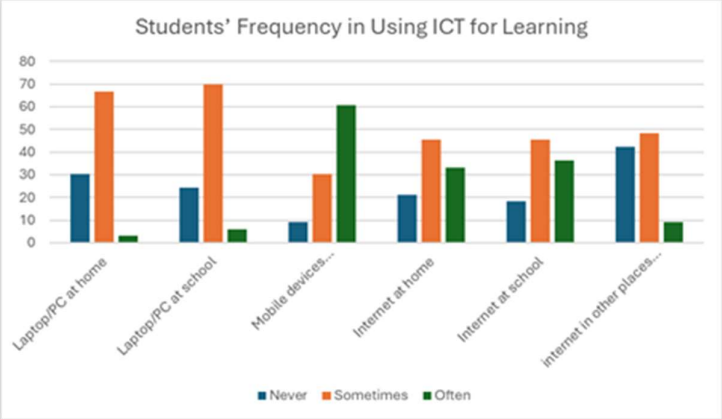

Figure 1. Students' Frequency in Using ICT for Learning

The questionnaire data indicate that most students rely heavily on internet-connected mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, both at school and at home. It is known that mobile phones emerged as the most commonly used device for learning English, reported by 20 of the 33 respondents. This shows that students prefer devices that are easily accessible and flexible to support their daily

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learning activities. Frequency of ICT access does not by itself demonstrate critical digital literacy, but it does provide students with regular opportunities to practice searching for, evaluating, and using digital information for learning purposes (Kurniawati et al., 2018; Mardiah, 2022). Many students also reported using laptops and PCs, which allow for more complex tasks such as writing, reading, or engaging with interactive digital materials. According to Trilling & Fadel (2009), varied and frequent ICT use expands access to learning resources and creates conditions that can support the development of digital literacy, without guaranteeing it.

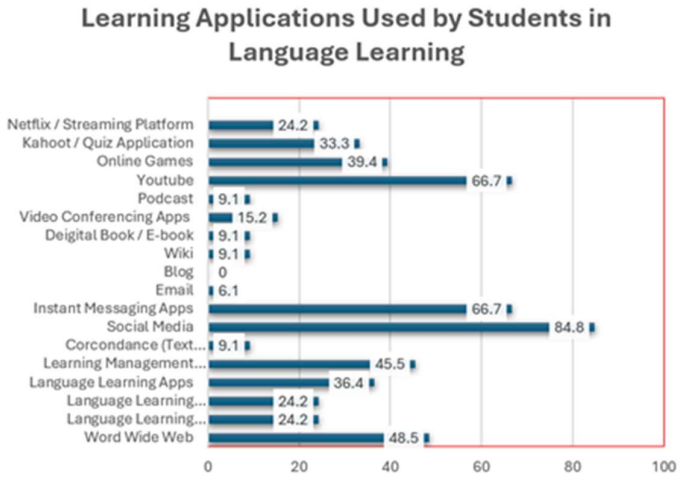

Figure 2. Learning Applications Used by Students in Language Learning

In terms of platforms, social media (84.8%) was the most widely used application for language learning, followed by instant messaging applications (66.7%) and YouTube (66.7%). The World Wide Web was used by 48.5% of participants, learning management systems by 45.5%, and online games by 39.4%, confirming the range of digital platforms students draw on for learning. This is consistent with Mardiah (2022), who argues that integrating digital literacy in EFL encourages students to access, analyze, and use digital information, and with Pertiwi & Rodliyah (2022), who found that such applications are a central resource for EFL students managing their own learning.

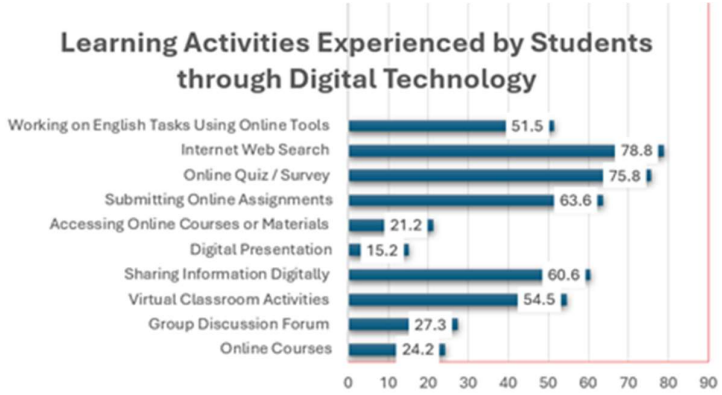

Figure 3. Learning Activities Experienced by Students through Digital Technology

Students most often used digital technology to search for information on the web (78.8%), take online quizzes or surveys (75.8%), and submit assignments online (63.6%); other common activities included sharing information digitally (60.6%), completing English assignments using online tools (51.5%), and participating in virtual classes (54.5%). These figures indicate that digital technology supports a range of flexible and interactive learning activities and gives students frequent occasions to access, evaluate, and use information relevant to language learning (Kurniawati et al., 2018; Mardiah, 2022; Pertiwi & Rodliyah, 2022; A. Rahman et al., 2023; Son et al., 2017).

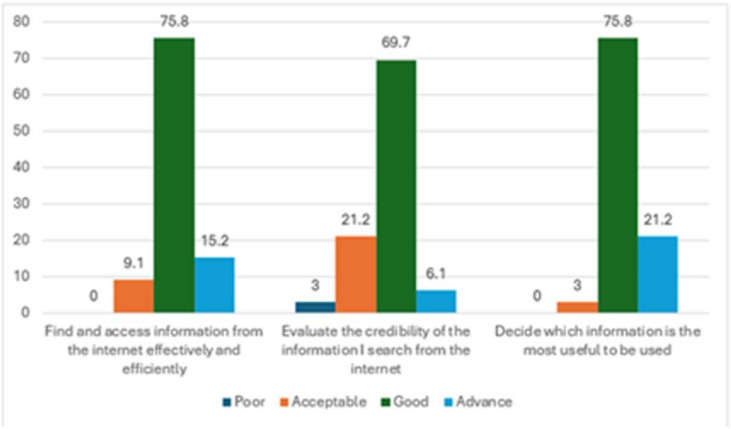

Figure 4. Students' Information Literacy Skill

Students' information literacy was assessed across three aspects: finding and accessing information, evaluating the credibility of information, and selecting information suited to their needs. Most participants rated themselves positively, with 75.8% reporting that they could find and access information effectively, 69.7% reporting that they could evaluate the credibility of information, and 75.8% reporting that they could select relevant information; few rated their abilities as low. These self-ratings indicate that participants generally perceive themselves as

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capable of using digital technology to support their English learning (Kurniawati et al., 2018; Mardiah, 2022; Pertiwi & Rodliyah, 2022), a perception that is examined further, and partly complicated, in the theme on critical evaluation below.

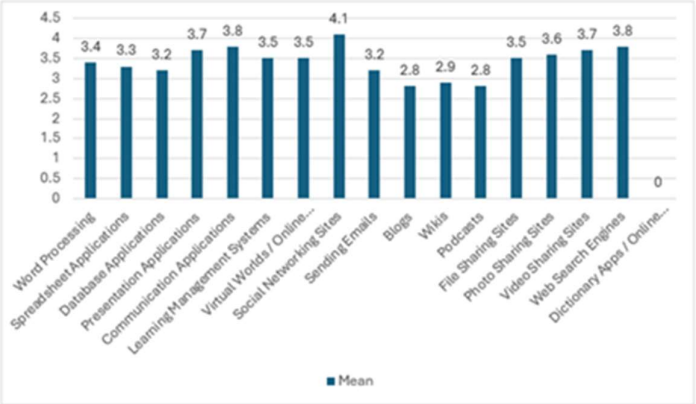

Figure 5. Students' ICT and Media Literacy Skill

Students also reported comparatively strong ICT and media literacy. More than half of the 33 respondents rated themselves as competent across several applications, with the highest average scores for email (4.1), communication applications and digital dictionaries (3.8 each), and web search engines and presentation applications (3.7 each); learning management systems, virtual environments, and social networking sites also showed fairly high average use (3.5), while wikis (2.8), podcasts (2.9), and file-sharing sites (2.8) showed lower usage. Taken together, these self-reported scores, measured on a 1-to-5 scale from never used to advanced, suggest that students are broadly familiar and comfortable with a range of digital technologies. This is consistent with Trilling & Fadel (2009), who describe media literacy as involving not only the ability to access media but also to convert information into varied formats and to create communication products such as videos, audio, and podcasts.

Autonomous and Informal English Learning

Interview data show that students use digital tools to support fast, self-directed learning. P1 explained that he feels happy because he can understand material faster when using digital tools, and P2 reported relying on Gemini and Blackbox to assist in understanding grammar and coding-related material.

> *"Happy because I can understand it faster".* (P1, interview)

> *"Usually I use Gemini, then Blackbox to assist in understanding grammar and coding-related data".* (P2, interview)

P3 described using Duolingo for its structured vocabulary levels. These accounts are consistent with the survey finding that a large majority of students rely on social media (84.8%) and search engines (78.8%) for learning, and with

students' relatively high self-rated ability to retrieve information (75.8%); together, they suggest that for these students, digital tools function less as supplementary aids and more as an accessible, self-directed pathway into English input and practice.

The interviews also indicate that this autonomy is driven less by classroom instruction than by immediate, task-specific needs a pattern of self-directed, informal digital learning also observed by Pertiwi & Rodliyah (2022) among university EFL learners. For these vocational students, digital tools appear to function as just-in-time support, particularly for tasks such as interpreting grammar or technical vocabulary, which is consistent with Rodliyah's (2018) argument about the relevance of ICT in vocational English education.

Vocational Relevance of English and Technology

For TKJ students, English and digital technology are closely tied to their vocational identity rather than treated as separate academic subjects. As P1 explained:

> *"Because when it comes to computers, everything is in English. English is a universal language, so we need to know it. At the very least, we need to understand what it means so that we can operate the computer.".* (P1, interview)

P2 similarly emphasized that English is essential for using computers, and P3 described using YouTube tutorials to learn the functions of networking tools by matching images with their functions, illustrating a multimodal approach to building technical vocabulary. P4 reported watching English-language content from creators such as MrBeast and IShowSpeed because they are "more unique" (P4, interview), and P3 described using TikTok to keep up with current trends, both suggesting that motivation for engaging with English digital content stems as much from entertainment and cultural relevance as from academic requirements.

These patterns support Sahiruddin et al.'s (2025) call for embedding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials within digital platforms, and are consistent with Herdi, Fauzan, Asih, & Rizky (2024), who found that online resources increase EFL learners' engagement by providing authentic materials. In this vocational context, students' engagement with English content extends beyond passive exposure: they describe using it to accomplish specific technical tasks, suggesting that digital English practices are perceived as directly supporting employability and technical competence, a dimension that has received comparatively little attention in prior digital-literacy research conducted with university students (Pertiwi & Rodliyah, 2022).

Critical Evaluation and Environmental Constraints: The Access–Critical Evaluation Gap

Although 69.7% of students reported in the questionnaire that they could evaluate the credibility of information, the interviews reveal a less consistent

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picture in practice. P3 described feeling doubtful when using AI tools and said she checks translations one by one, while P4 said users should check twice.

Despite frequent technology use, students demonstrated inconsistent levels of critical awareness in evaluating information accuracy. P3 acknowledged her doubts when using AI tools which leads her to verify information manually. P4 added that users should check twice. In contrast, P1 acknowledged that a lack of motivation sometimes led to insufficiently disciplined verification.

> *"Sometimes I am a bit doubtful, so i check it on Google translate... one by one".* (P3, interview)

> *"It's too small so hard to be read."* (P4, interview)

In contrast, P1 acknowledged that low motivation sometimes led him to skip verification:

> *"Sometimes I feel that way, but when I'm too lazy, I just follow it."* (P1, interview)

This contrast between the relatively high self-reported ability to evaluate information (69.7%) and the uneven verification practices described in the interviews is one of the clearest findings of this study and is treated here as a central theme: students appear comfortable accessing digital information but do not consistently apply critical-evaluation strategies to it. This gap echoes Mardiah (2022), who argues that digital literacy requires critical evaluation and not merely access, and Kurniawati et al. (2018), who note that even digitally native students benefit from teacher guidance in developing these practices.

Students also identified barriers that shape how consistently they can engage critically with digital information. P3 reported struggling to maintain focus, noting that she used alarms to regulate herself because of the temptation to open other apps; P4 described small screens as too small to read comfortably; and P1 reported that the internet connection is slow.

> *"Lack of focus, wanting to open other apps and used alarms to regulate myself."* (P3, interview)

> *"The internet connection is slow."* (P1, interview)

The distraction students describe is consistent with the high reported use of social media (84.8%), suggesting that the same platforms that support learning also compete for students' attention, while small screens and unreliable connectivity point to environmental constraints that are independent of students' cognitive or critical-thinking skills. Taken together, these findings suggest that self-reported confidence in evaluating information should be interpreted cautiously, and that it reflects students' general comfort with digital access more than a demonstrated, consistently applied critical-evaluation practice.

4. Discussion

Across the four themes, the most prominent finding is the distinction between

students' operational digital fluency, reflected in their ability to comfortably access, navigate, and use various digital tools and platforms, and their critical digital literacy, reflected in their consistent use of evaluative and source-verification practices. Students in this study demonstrated strong operational fluency: they moved easily between smartphones, laptops, social media, messaging apps, AI tools, and learning platforms, and used these tools autonomously to support their English learning. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that vocational and EFL learners increasingly rely on digital tools for language learning (Herdi et al., 2024; Wang, 2022). However, the same students reported inconsistent critical-evaluation practices, verifying information only sometimes and, by their own account, occasionally skipping verification altogether when unmotivated. This distinction builds on Mardiah (2022) and Falloon (2020), who argue that digital literacy involves more than operational skill, and extends their argument by showing, through both questionnaire and interview evidence, where the gap between access and evaluation appears for this specific group of learners.

The vocational dimension of these findings adds a perspective that is largely absent from previous digital-literacy research conducted with university students. Where Pertiwi & Rodliyah (2022) found that university students valued digital tools primarily for enhancing English learning engagement and motivation, the vocational students in this study connected their digital English practices specifically to technical tasks and employability. For instance, using English to operate computers, interpret technical documentation, and learn networking-tool functions through YouTube tutorials. This suggests that for vocational learners, digital literacy in EFL is not only a matter of language development but also of professional preparation, and this vocational specificity, rather than simply the shift to a younger participant group, is the primary contribution of this study.

Students' reliance on informal digital resources such as YouTube, TikTok, and English-language content creators for language exposure is also worth noting as a form of self-directed, informal English learning that occurs largely outside the classroom. This pattern is consistent with the broader shift, documented elsewhere in EFL research, toward learners drawing on entertainment and social media platforms as sources of authentic language input; it does not by itself demonstrate measurable gains in vocabulary, pronunciation, or cultural awareness, since this study did not directly assess language outcomes, but it does indicate that students perceive their engagement with digital English content as a meaningful part of their learning experience.

The gap between students' access skills and their critical-evaluation practices carries a clear pedagogical implication rather than assuming that frequent technology use will, on its own, translate into critical digital literacy, EFL teachers in vocational settings may need to explicitly guide students in comparing, questioning, and verifying digital information. This recommendation is consistent with Howard, Tondeur, Ma, & Yang Jie (2021), who argue that effective technology integration requires intentional instructional design rather than reliance on

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students' independent use of digital tools. Given that AI tools such as Gemini and Blackbox were reported as part of students' regular practice, teachers could design tasks that require students to test, question, and cross-check AI-generated output rather than accept it uncritically. Because 54.5% of students already participate in virtual classes and use learning management systems, and because students already draw on YouTube and social media informally, integrating curated materials for example, ESP-oriented YouTube playlists for TKJ tools into formal instruction may help teachers build on, and guide, practices students are already engaged in, rather than introducing platforms with which they are unfamiliar. Any such integration should also attend to pedagogical selection, factual accuracy, privacy, and source reliability, since simply adopting the platforms students already use does not, by itself, ensure that they are used well.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single vocational high school and a single major (TKJ), which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other vocational fields or institutions. The questionnaire involved only 33 participants, and only four students were interviewed because these four were purposively selected for the richness of their open-ended responses, they likely represent more digitally reflective students, and their accounts may not capture the experiences of peers who face greater difficulties with digital literacy. Both the questionnaire and interviews relied on self-report, which is subject to social desirability and accuracy limitations, and the study did not include any direct, performance-based assessment of students' digital-literacy skills. Future research could address these limitations by including a more diverse sample across schools and vocational majors, and by using performance-based tasks like asking students to evaluate the reliability of specific websites, compare AI-generated information against credible sources, identify instances of misinformation, and justify their source choices to complement self-report data with direct evidence of students' digital-literacy performance.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how vocational high school students in a Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program perceive the integration of digital literacy in EFL learning, drawing on a questionnaire completed by 33 students and in-depth interviews with four purposively selected participants. Overall, participants held positive attitudes toward digital literacy in EFL learning and reported broad, comfortable access to digital tools and platforms, particularly social media, messaging applications, YouTube, and AI tools such as Gemini and Blackbox. For these vocational learners, English and digital technology were closely tied to their professional identity: students described using English-language digital resources not only to support their academic learning but also to operate computers, interpret technical content, and prepare for career-related tasks in their field.

At the same time, the study's most significant finding is the gap between

students' self-reported ability to evaluate information critically and their actual, inconsistently applied verification practices, shaped in part by motivation and in part by environmental constraints such as small screens and unreliable internet access. This finding indicates that frequent digital access and use should not be assumed to translate automatically into critical digital literacy, and it points to a specific area guided critical evaluation, where classroom instruction could meaningfully build on students' existing digital habits.

Given that this study was conducted in a single vocational high school and major, with a modest and purposively selected sample and self-report data collected mainly through a questionnaire and interviews, its findings should be interpreted as illustrative rather than generalizable. Future research would benefit from a more diverse sample across schools and vocational fields and from performance-based tasks such as evaluating specific sources, comparing AI-generated content with credible references, or identifying misinformation that can assess students' digital-literacy practices directly rather than relying solely on self-report. Such research, combined with continued attention to how EFL instruction can support critical, career-relevant digital literacy, would help vocational educators better prepare students to navigate digital information as both language learners and future professionals.

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