

Subtitled, streamed, and spoken: Virtual immersion as a pedagogical framework for foreign language learning

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of virtual immersion on foreign language acquisition among Indonesian university students. It specifically explores how learners utilize digital environments—including streaming platforms, social media, and language applications—to develop linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence, and investigates methods for integrating these informal practices into formal curricular structures. Grounded in theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), sociocultural theory, and task-based language teaching, the research employed a quantitative-descriptive design. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to 164 multilingual undergraduates studying English, Japanese, French, Chinese, and Korean. Analysis using descriptive statistics and thematic coding revealed that participants actively engage with subtitled media, online communities, and language apps, reporting significant gains in vocabulary and grammatical recognition. However, development in productive skills, particularly oral proficiency, remained limited without scaffolded interaction and feedback. While students exhibited high motivation through self-directed content selection, they identified a critical need for institutional scaffolding, educator training, and technological support. These findings informed the development of a five-component Virtual Immersion Integration Framework, which synergizes authentic digital content, collaborative tasks, intercultural pedagogy, motivational design, and instructional support. This study contributes to the domain of technology-enhanced

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language learning by providing an evidence-based, scalable model to align informal digital immersion practices with formal higher education curricula in multilingual settings.

Keywords: *Virtual immersion; Foreign language learning; Digital media; Task-based instruction; Intercultural competence*

1. Introduction

The integration of digital media into language learning has become a prominent area of research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Over the past few decades, the rapid expansion of the internet, mobile technology, and social media platforms has significantly transformed how individuals' access and interact with foreign languages. In the context of higher education, students are exposed to a wide range of digital content, such as films, music, social media, online games, and educational apps, which collectively offer an immersive experience in the target language. This new form of exposure to authentic language input outside the classroom has the potential to complement formal language instruction and accelerate learning. However, despite the increasing interest in virtual environments for language learning, systematic studies examining the impact of these digital tools on language acquisition, especially in the context of Indonesian higher education, remain limited.

Recent studies in digital media and language learning have explored the effects of virtual immersion on learners' vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and cultural understanding. Researchers have observed that engaging with digital content in a foreign language enhances students' exposure to authentic language use, which can improve their language proficiency. For instance, studies on video games and social media platforms have shown that these forms of digital media provide learners with opportunities for natural language exposure in meaningful contexts (Dhimolea et al., 2021). Furthermore, virtual immersion in media has been linked to improvements in intercultural competence, as students encounter diverse cultural practices and norms through digital content. Despite these promising findings, the integration of virtual immersion into formal language courses is still an underexplored area of research, particularly in non-Western educational contexts like Indonesia.

The main research problem of this study revolves around how students in Indonesian higher education engage with digital media for language learning and the impact of this exposure on their language acquisition. Specifically, the study aims to explore the types of media used by students to interact with the target language, the linguistic and cultural benefits derived from such media, and the potential for incorporating virtual immersion into formal language education. While the integration of digital tools into language learning has been advocated by some scholars, there is a lack of concrete strategies and models that demonstrate how virtual immersion can be effectively incorporated into university language curricula. Thus, the study seeks to

provide evidence-based insights into how these digital tools can be structured and utilized to maximize language learning outcomes.

Building on the growing body of research on digital immersion, this study proposes that virtual immersion in digital media, when integrated with task-based and collaborative learning strategies, can significantly enhance language acquisition in higher education. The study will address the gap in literature by offering a framework for using virtual media in formal language instruction and analyzing its effects on students' language proficiency. The hypothesis underpinning this research is that systematic virtual immersion will improve students' vocabulary, grammar, speaking skills, and intercultural competence when compared to traditional language instruction alone.

Previous studies have highlighted the potential benefits of virtual immersion, but have failed to offer clear guidelines for its integration into classroom settings. This research aims to bridge that gap by developing a structured approach to virtual immersion that can be applied within the context of Indonesian universities. Through a combination of media exposure and task-based activities, this study seeks to create a more immersive language-learning environment that is both practical and scalable.

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of virtual immersion on language learning in Indonesian higher education and to propose a model for integrating digital media into formal language courses. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on Indonesian students and their specific media consumption habits, as well as its development of a comprehensive virtual immersion framework that can be applied across different language courses. The study will contribute to the field of SLA by providing empirical evidence on the role of digital media in language acquisition and offering practical recommendations for educators seeking to enhance language learning through technology.

2. Literature review

2.1. Second language acquisition and digital media

The field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has undergone significant evolution with the advent of new technologies. Traditional language learning theories focused primarily on face-to-face interactions and teacher-centered approaches. However, with the increasing availability of digital resources, language learning has expanded to include virtual environments that provide more authentic and contextualized exposure to the target language. Virtual media such as social media platforms, streaming services, and language learning apps have become important tools for language learners, offering them opportunities to engage with language in dynamic and interactive ways. Recent systematic reviews show that social media, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), and other online platforms can function as rich language learning environments, providing multimodal input, interactional opportunities, and learner autonomy (Barrot, 2021; Zain & Bowles, 2021; Kaur et al., 2023).

Research in SLA has consistently emphasized the importance of *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1982) for language learners. The idea is that learners acquire language most effectively when they are exposed to input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level but still understandable. Virtual media provide abundant opportunities for such input, as they offer authentic language use in diverse contexts, which can help learners improve both their linguistic and pragmatic skills. For instance, a systematic review of streaming media for English language learners' vocabulary development reports that video-on-demand platforms and other streaming services can support incidental vocabulary learning when features such as subtitles, repetition, and learner control are used strategically (Gatcho, 2024). Furthermore, interaction with digital content allows for continuous exposure, making it easier for learners to internalize new vocabulary and grammar structures. Technology-assisted language learning (TALL) systems increasingly personalize this input by adapting difficulty and content to learners' profiles, which further enhances the potential for effective SLA. For instance, a systematic review of streaming media for English language learners' vocabulary development reports that video-on-demand platforms and other streaming services can support incidental vocabulary learning when features such as subtitles, repetition, and learner control are used strategically (Gatcho, 2024). digital environments (Kaur et al., 2023).

2.2. *Virtual immersion and its role in language acquisition*

Virtual immersion refers to the use of digital media as a means of immersing language learners in a simulated environment where they can engage with the target language. This immersion occurs outside the classroom setting, through media such as films, TV shows, social media, podcasts, and video games. Unlike traditional classroom instruction, virtual immersion allows learners to experience language in its natural context, helping them to develop a more intuitive understanding of language use. Recent technology-focused reviews conclude that digital tools—ranging from mobile apps to game-based platforms and virtual learning environments—can create immersion-like conditions that support vocabulary growth, grammar development, and communicative skills (Kaur et al., 2023; Robbani et al., 2024). Studies on virtual immersion have shown that such exposure leads to improvements in vocabulary retention, grammatical accuracy, and cultural knowledge (Dhimolea et al., 2021).

Game-based environments also provide concrete examples of immersive digital contexts. For example, Octaberlina and Rofiki (2021) found that Indonesian EFL learners who engaged with online games in English showed enrichment of their vocabulary and reported high levels of motivation and enjoyment, indicating that virtual play spaces can function as informal yet powerful settings for language acquisition.

Moreover, virtual immersion can complement formal language instruction by providing learners with opportunities to practice their language skills outside of the classroom. This is especially relevant in contexts where opportunities for face-to-face

interaction with native speakers are limited. For instance, students who are learning English in non-English-speaking countries can use virtual media to interact with native speakers, thereby bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. Additionally, media consumption through platforms like YouTube and social media allows students to engage with a variety of language registers and cultural nuances, further enhancing their language acquisition. (Barrot, 2021; Zain & Bowles, 2021).

Furthermore, a key advantage of virtual immersion is the high degree of learner autonomy it facilitates. Unlike a standardized curriculum, digital environments allow students to curate their own learning journeys based on personal interests, which significantly boosts motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). A student passionate about Japanese anime can acquire language through fan subcultures, while another interested in French politics might follow relevant news channels and influencers. This personalized, interest-driven approach not only sustains long-term engagement but also fosters the development of a unique linguistic repertoire and identity, making the learning process more meaningful and self-directed than what is often achievable in traditional classroom settings alone.

2.3. Task-based learning and virtual immersion

Task-based learning (TBL) is an instructional approach that emphasizes the completion of meaningful tasks rather than focusing solely on language form. TBL has been shown to improve language learning by encouraging learners to use language in context and promoting communicative competence. When combined with virtual immersion, TBL can provide a rich, interactive language-learning environment that is both motivating and effective. For instance, students might watch a foreign-language film and then participate in a discussion or create a summary of the film, thereby reinforcing their language skills through practical tasks. In film-based instruction, recent systematic work shows that tasks such as scene re-enactments, reflective journals, and project work around movies can foster both linguistic development and higher-order skills such as interpretation and critical thinking (Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023).

Several studies have explored the potential of combining TBL with virtual immersion to enhance language learning. Lai (2020) suggests that task-based activities, when paired with authentic digital media, can help students develop both linguistic accuracy and fluency. More recently, Al-Rashidi (2025) reported that digital task-based instruction—implemented through online platforms and multimedia tasks—significantly increased Saudi EFL students' motivation compared to more traditional instruction, underlining the motivational benefits of technology-mediated TBL (Al-Rashidi, 2025). By engaging in tasks that require the use of language in real-life scenarios, students can better internalize new vocabulary and structures. Furthermore, virtual immersion through media provides context-rich experiences that enhance learners' cultural competence, which is often overlooked in traditional language teaching.

2.4. The impact of digital media on cultural competence

In addition to improving linguistic skills, virtual immersion has been shown to enhance students' cultural competence. Language is intrinsically tied to culture, and exposure to digital media can help learners understand the social and cultural contexts in which language is used. For example, films, TV shows, and social media platforms provide learners with insight into the values, behaviors, and practices of the culture associated with the target language. This exposure is crucial for developing intercultural competence, which is an important aspect of language proficiency (Byram, 1997).

Recent studies have demonstrated the positive effects of digital media on cultural learning. A systematic review on the use of films in EFL teaching highlights that film-based instruction not only supports vocabulary and listening comprehension but also deepens learners' understanding of cultural norms, humor, and pragmatic conventions represented in audiovisual texts (Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023). Similarly, Omar and Razi (2022) showed that instruction based on movie and TV series clips significantly improved EFL learners' pragmatic competence in performing speech acts, indicating that exposure to authentic audiovisual media can sharpen learners' awareness of culturally appropriate language use.

Beyond film and television, virtual exchange and other forms of online intercultural collaboration also contribute to cultural learning. Hagley (2024), for example, found that EFL students participating in a virtual exchange project experienced gains in cultural and intercultural sensitivity through sustained online interaction with peers from other countries using English as a lingua franca, within a Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal (CALL-EJ) context—an outlet that has been recognized as a Scopus-indexed Q1 journal. These cultural insights are essential for effective communication, as language learners must not only know how to construct grammatically correct sentences but also understand the cultural meanings and implications behind their words.

While there is a growing body of literature on the role of digital media in language learning, significant gaps remain in terms of practical application and integration into formal education systems. Much of the existing research focuses on the use of digital media in informal, out-of-school settings, with little emphasis on how these tools can be systematically incorporated into language courses. Recent systematic reviews on technology-mediated immersion and streaming media in language learning point out that, although digital tools offer promising affordances, empirical evidence related to long-term language proficiency gains and curriculum-level integration is still limited (Gatcho, 2024; Robbani et al., 2024).

Additionally, studies on virtual immersion often lack empirical evidence on its long-term effects on language proficiency. There is a need for more research that explores how virtual immersion can be integrated into university language curricula, particularly in non-Western contexts like Indonesia, where digital media consumption patterns may differ from those in Western countries. Existing work on Indonesian EFL learners has,

for instance, explored the use of online games to enrich vocabulary (Octaberlina & Rofiki, 2021) and the development of mobile English applications for young learners' needs in formal schooling (Fansury et al., 2025), but these initiatives are typically examined as isolated interventions rather than as structured components of a comprehensive curriculum.

This literature review highlights the potential of virtual immersion in digital media as an effective tool for language learning. The combination of digital media, task-based learning, and cultural exposure can enhance students' linguistic and cultural competence, offering a more holistic approach to language education. Recent Scopus-indexed studies across diverse contexts—ranging from social media and MALL reviews to game-based learning, film-based instruction, and virtual exchange—collectively suggest that digital environments can support vocabulary growth, pragmatic development, motivation, and intercultural competence (Barrot, 2021; Zain & Bowles, 2021; Octaberlina & Rofiki, 2021; Omar & Razi, 2022; Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023; Gatcho, 2024; Hagley, 2024; Al-Rashidi, 2025) However, there remains a need for further research on how to effectively integrate virtual immersion into formal language courses. This study aims to address this gap by developing a framework for integrating digital media into language curricula in Indonesian higher education, providing practical recommendations for educators seeking to enhance language learning through virtual immersion.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This research adopted a quantitative-descriptive design to investigate the integration of virtual immersion in foreign language learning at the university level. The focus was to explore the types of virtual media consumed by students, the linguistic and cultural gains they experienced, and how such immersion might be effectively embedded into formal curricula. By employing a survey-based approach, the study captured a comprehensive overview of the patterns, perceptions, and practical implications of digital-media usage in the context of second language acquisition (SLA) among undergraduates.

The rationale for using this design was twofold. First, it enabled the systematic quantification of student engagement with a variety of digital platforms. Second, it facilitated the identification of recurring patterns across a diverse multilingual population. The approach was informed by previous studies (e.g., Lai, 2016; Dhimolea et al., 2022) which demonstrated that exposure to immersive digital environments fosters noticeable improvement in vocabulary development, grammar acquisition, and cultural competence.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 164 university students from universities in Malang, East Java, who were enrolled in foreign language courses offered within various social sciences and humanities programs at different faculties (e.g.,

literature, communication, international relations, and education). These students were learning English, Japanese, French, Chinese, or Korean as part of their academic curriculum. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with ethical considerations aligned with institutional research protocols.

A stratified sampling technique was used to ensure a representative distribution across different language majors. The diversity of the participant pool enabled the study to compare immersion experiences across multiple linguistic and cultural domains. Most of the students were between 18–23 years of age, representing the Gen-Z demographic whose media consumption habits are deeply interwoven with digital platforms.

3.3. Data collection instruments

The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed based on constructs derived from SLA theories, immersion frameworks, and previous digital-learning studies (e.g., Krashen, 1982; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990; Liu & Brown, 2023). It was designed to assess students' frequency of media use, types of content consumed, perceived gains in vocabulary and grammar, and their exposure to cultural knowledge.

The questionnaire contents are: (1) demographic information; (2) types of virtual media accessed; (3) language skills perceived as improved through digital immersion; (4) frequency and nature of interaction with native or fluent speakers online; (5) perception of digital content as a source of cultural knowledge; and (6) alignment of digital media use with classroom activities. Open-ended items were included to allow respondents to elaborate on personal experiences, preferences, and suggestions.

3.4. Procedures

The data collection process was conducted online using Google Forms. A preliminary validation of the questionnaire was conducted through expert review by three language-education researchers to ensure clarity, coherence, and construct validity. Minor revisions were made before dissemination. Students were given one week to complete the survey, with reminders sent through institutional communication channels.

To ensure the reliability of the data, responses were screened for completeness and consistency. Duplicates, if any, were removed. Anonymity was guaranteed throughout the process to encourage honest and reflective responses.

3.5. Data analysis techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, means, and percentages were calculated to interpret the patterns of virtual-media usage, language-skill development, and cultural exposure. For open-ended responses, thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring motifs that complemented the statistical findings. The analysis sought to uncover how different platforms—such as YouTube,

Duolingo, TikTok, Discord, and Netflix—served as informal learning environments that nurtured vocabulary acquisition, cultural interpretation, and communication skills.

The analysis also integrated theoretical constructs from Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory to contextualize the findings. For example, high-frequency engagement with subtitled video content was linked to comprehensible input and noticing mechanisms, while participation in digital communities was mapped onto motivation and social presence dimensions.

3.6. Trustworthiness and validity

While the study employed a non-experimental design, several strategies were adopted to enhance validity. Content validity was ensured through expert validation of the instrument. Construct validity was supported by grounding the questionnaire items in established SLA and digital-immersion theories. Triangulation of data sources—survey items, open-ended responses, and follow-up focus groups—provided a multi-layered understanding of the phenomena.

Although no inferential statistics were applied due to the exploratory nature of the study, the breadth of the data set and consistency across responses enhanced the internal reliability of the results. The limitations of the research design, including potential self-reporting bias and limited generalizability beyond the studied institution, were acknowledged in the discussion section.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The research followed ethical protocols consistent with institutional standards. Participants were briefed about the purpose, voluntary nature, and anonymity of the study. Informed consent was obtained electronically before data collection. All data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

3.8. Conceptual alignment and theoretical framework

This methodology was anchored in a multi-theoretical framework integrating key concepts from Second Language Acquisition and digital learning research. The selection of instruments, interpretation of findings, and eventual formulation of the Virtual Immersion Collaboration Model were all guided by an understanding of language learning as both a cognitive and sociocultural process (Lantolf, 2000; Ellis, 2006). The study's focus on motivation, autonomy, and social engagement also reflects insights from Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, especially in its application to learner-driven digital environments.

Moreover, the methodology responded to calls for greater ecological validity in SLA research (Lai, 2016), aiming to reflect the authentic digital habits of learners rather than artificially constructed lab environments. By studying learners in their self-selected

immersion settings, the research captured real-world dynamics that often escape more controlled experimental designs.

3.9. Integration with curriculum innovation

Finally, the methodological framework was designed not only to generate descriptive insight but to inform the construction of a scalable model for curriculum integration. The quantitative data provided empirical justification for embedding virtual immersion into formal language instruction via blended learning, task-based instruction, and culturally responsive pedagogy. These insights were later visualized in a five-component conceptual model linking media input, collaborative task design, cultural competence, learner engagement, and teacher-technology infrastructure. This forward-looking perspective connects empirical observation with actionable innovation for institutional stakeholders.

4. Findings and discussion

The findings of this study are presented in the following tables.

Table 1

Quantitative results.

Indicator	Result
Use target-language subtitles	91.9% of respondents
Weekly virtual-media engagement	> 10 hours on average
Reported vocabulary growth	100% of participants
Frequent speaking practice opportunities	64% of participants
Received peer/tutor speaking feedback	53% of participants

This table provides a concise overview of the principal behavioral and outcome indicators observed in the study. It reports the prevalence of target-language subtitle use, the average weekly duration of virtual-media engagement, and self-reported learning outcomes that are central to the analysis. Taken together, the high rate of subtitle use (91.9%) and sustained weekly engagement (>10 hours) suggest that students have established an informal immersive environment outside class. At the same time, the lower proportions for frequent speaking practice (64%) and receipt of peer/tutor feedback (53%) indicate a persistent gap on the output side, underscoring the need for purposeful interaction and structured feedback within the curriculum.

Table 2

Thematic result.

Thema	Key points	Typical examples/notes
Media Preferences and Use Patterns	Students actively use multiple virtual media for language learning; entertainment content dominates; subtitles widely used.	Subtitled YouTube; Netflix/Viu; apps: Duolingo, Babel; social media: TikTok, Instagram; drama/anime/films/reality shows.

Linguistic and Cultural Outcomes	Clear lexical gains and better grammar awareness via repeated patterns; speaking lags behind listening/reading; cultural/pragmatic awareness improves.	100% report vocabulary growth; 64% frequent speaking practice; 53% receive feedback; internalization of norms, politeness, idioms (Schmidt's Noticing; Long's Interaction).
Curriculum Integration and Student Response	Strong student support for integrating media into coursework and TBLT tasks; preference for blended learning.	Tasks: discussions, reflective essays, role-plays, scene reinterpretation; align with Willis (TBLT), Lai & Graham (blended).
Motivational Effects and Learner Autonomy	Motivation rises when learners choose interest-aligned content; online communities sustain engagement and practice.	Music, fandoms, K-dramas/anime/French cinema; forums, Discord, comment sections → communities of practice (Wenger); autonomy per SDT (Deci & Ryan).
Pedagogical Infrastructure and Institutional Readiness	Barriers include uneven access, limited techno pedagogical training, and scarce structured speaking feedback; need institutional support.	Invest in connectivity/resources, teacher training, assessment frameworks; guided scaffolding and AI-supported feedback/analytics.

This table synthesizes qualitative and categorical findings across the study's main theme, translating narrative results into a compact, comparable format. The "Key points" column distils recurrent patterns (e.g., dominant platforms, skills affected, integration preferences), while the "Typical examples/notes" column illustrates these patterns with concrete instances (e.g., YouTube/Netflix/Viu, Duolingo/Babbel, TikTok/Instagram) and relevant theoretical anchors (e.g., comprehensible input, noticing, interaction, self-determination, communities of practice). The table shows how diverse media practices map onto linguistic and cultural outcomes, how students prefer these practices to be integrated through task-based and blended approaches, and where motivational gains co-exist with infrastructural and pedagogical constraints. It thereby functions as a bridge between descriptive evidence and the study's implementation guidance and policy implications.

4.1. Media preferences and use patterns

The study revealed that Indonesian university students actively engage with a wide range of virtual media to support their foreign language learning. The most frequently used platforms included subtitled YouTube videos, streaming services such as Netflix and Viu, mobile learning applications like Duolingo and Babbel, and social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Entertainment media—particularly drama series, anime, films, and reality shows—were dominant sources of input. These tools, used individually or in combination, provided a rich and diverse linguistic environment outside formal classroom contexts.

Statistical findings indicated that 91.9% of respondents relied on target-language subtitles while engaging with these media. This behavior is consistent with the theory of *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1982), where learners acquire language when exposed to input slightly above their current level ($i+1$) in a meaningful context. In addition, the weekly average for virtual media engagement exceeded ten hours, confirming that learners have constructed an informal immersive space that supplements classroom instruction.

4.2. Linguistic and cultural outcomes

Students reported significant lexical gains across all target languages studied—English, Japanese, Korean, French, and Mandarin. Vocabulary was acquired through repetition, contextual inference, and association with scenes and characters in audiovisual content. Grammar understanding was facilitated through recurring syntactic patterns heard in dialogues and narration. These processes align with Schmidt's *Noticing Hypothesis* (1990), which underscores the importance of conscious awareness of linguistic forms in acquisition.

However, productive skills—especially speaking—lagged behind receptive development. While 100% of participants acknowledged vocabulary growth, only 64% reported frequent opportunities to practice speaking, and just 53% received peer or tutor feedback. Despite access to virtual exchange platforms, many students practiced speaking sporadically or passively. This suggests that while media deliver input effectively, interaction and output must be intentionally scaffolded, as posited in Long's *Interaction Hypothesis* (1996).

Culturally, the immersion through virtual media allowed students to internalize social norms, politeness strategies, idiomatic expressions, and behavioral conventions of the target-language communities. This outcome supports findings from Byram (1997) and Barrot (2022), who argue that intercultural competence is best cultivated through contact with authentic cultural texts.

4.3. Curriculum integration and student response

The integration of virtual immersion into formal instruction was met with enthusiastic support. Students endorsed the use of drama, songs, and films as course content and advocated for their incorporation into task-based speaking, writing, listening, and grammar assignments. These responses suggest a demand for a blended-learning approach, combining face-to-face instruction with digital enrichment, as supported by Lai (2016) and Graham (2006).

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) was particularly effective in converting passive media consumption into active engagement. Assignments included group discussions, reflective essays, role-plays, and scene reinterpretation. These activities not only reinforced linguistic structures but also deepened comprehension by making students agents of meaning production. According to Willis (1996), this focus on real-world

communicative tasks promotes language use in context, a principle validated by this study's empirical findings.

4.4. Motivational effects and learner autonomy

Virtual immersion enhanced learner motivation and autonomy. Students expressed increased enthusiasm for language learning when given freedom to choose content that matched their interests. Music, fandoms, influencers, and genre-specific media (e.g., K-dramas, anime, French cinema) were instrumental in creating emotional bonds between learners and target languages. The study corroborates Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which links autonomy, competence, and relatedness to sustained motivation.

Moreover, the presence of interactive platforms such as forums, Discord groups, and comment sections allowed for social presence and the formation of *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998). These digital spaces offered low-stakes, continuous opportunities for interaction with both peers and native speakers, enhancing pragmatic and sociolinguistic development.

4.5. Pedagogical infrastructure and institutional readiness

Despite its advantages, virtual immersion implementation is constrained by infrastructural and pedagogical factors. Many instructors lack the technical training to curate and deliver virtual media effectively or to integrate student-generated content into assessment frameworks. Furthermore, internet access and digital-resource availability remain uneven across Indonesian campuses. The success of virtual immersion thus hinges on institutional investment in technology, teacher training, and curriculum reform.

Students also highlighted the need for more structured speaking feedback. While some used AI-based pronunciation tools or joined tandem language exchanges, others were unaware of available resources or felt unsure about self-assessment techniques. This underscores the importance of guided scaffolding and responsive feedback mechanisms, potentially supported by adaptive technologies and AI-based analytics.

4.6. Virtual immersion collaboration model

The five components of the framework are best understood not as isolated elements, but as an interconnected system that organizes how virtual immersion can be meaningfully integrated into higher education language learning. At its core, the model proposes that authentic virtual media provide rich linguistic and cultural input, which is then activated and transformed through task-based and collaborative activities. These processes, when properly supported by pedagogical design and institutional infrastructure, foster both linguistic-cultural competence and sustained learner motivation, creating a dynamic and recursive cycle of immersion and growth.

4.7. *Virtual media for input and interaction*

Virtual media for input and interaction form the starting point of this cycle. Subtitled films, drama series, anime, vlogs, interactive language apps, and social networks expose learners to authentic language as it is used in real contexts. Because these media combine visual, auditory, textual, and sometimes interactive channels, they naturally support both bottom-up processing (e.g., decoding sounds, words, and structures) and top-down processing (e.g., predicting meaning from context, genre, and prior knowledge). However, in this framework, media are never positioned as passive “entertainment.” They are deliberately selected and framed as both language models and cultural texts, which means that every viewing, listening, or interaction is treated as an opportunity to notice features of language use and cultural practice.

4.8. *Task-based and collaborative learning activities*

To convert this rich input into deeper learning, the framework emphasizes task-based and collaborative learning activities. After engaging with media, learners are not simply asked to recall content, but to *do something* with it: discuss characters’ decisions, re-tell a scene, expand a storyline, role-play a cultural scenario, debate controversial issues, or compose written reflections and responses. These tasks push learners from receptive to productive modes and encourage negotiation of meaning with peers. In this way, media consumption and task design are tightly interrelated: the media provide the shared experiential basis, while the tasks transform that experience into active language construction. Over time, cycles of input–task–feedback allow learners to internalize new vocabulary, structures, and discourse patterns in a more meaningful and memorable way.

4.9. *Development of linguistic and cultural competence*

Within this process, the development of linguistic and cultural competence is treated as a single, integrated goal. Learners are not only exposed to grammar and vocabulary, but also to cultural values, norms of politeness, patterns of body language, social rituals, humor, and genre conventions embedded in the media they consume. Classroom activities explicitly guide learners to analyze these cultural elements: for example, examining how disagreements are handled in a drama, how senior–junior relationships are expressed linguistically, or how speech styles shift across formal and informal settings. This analytical work deepens understanding of pragmatics and intercultural communication, while at the same time reinforcing language forms in meaningful contexts. Thus, media, tasks, and cultural analysis are mutually reinforcing: authentic input makes cultural exploration possible; tasks structure that exploration; and the resulting insights feed back into more accurate and appropriate language use.

4.10. *Learner motivation and engagement*

Learner motivation and engagement operate as both a product and a driver of the whole system. When learners are allowed to work with media that align with their

interests—such as favorite genres, topics, or online communities—they are more likely to invest effort and persist through difficulty. Task designs that encourage exploration, choice, creativity, and collaboration further enhance this engagement, making learners feel that they are not just “doing exercises,” but participating in real communicative practices. As learners perceive progress in their ability to understand and discuss the media they enjoy, their sense of competence and autonomy increases, which in turn strengthens motivation. This creates a positive feedback loop: motivated learners engage more fully with the media and tasks, leading to greater linguistic and cultural gains, which then further reinforce motivation.

4.11. Technological and pedagogical support

All of these components *depend on adequate technological and pedagogical support*. Teachers act as designers and facilitators who select suitable media, align them with learning outcomes, scaffold tasks, and provide feedback on both language and intercultural understanding. They also mediate interaction—helping shy learners participate, organizing group work, and guiding reflection so that students can connect their media experiences to broader linguistic and cultural concepts. At the institutional level, reliable technological infrastructure (internet access, devices, platforms), clear policy support (e.g., guidelines for media use and assessment), and ongoing professional development are essential to sustain implementation. Without such support, virtual immersion risks becoming fragmented, superficial, or dependent on individual teachers’ enthusiasm rather than embedded as a coherent programmatic strategy.

Taken together, the five components form a holistic, learner-centered framework for virtual immersion in higher education. Authentic media supply the raw material for immersion; task-based and collaborative activities transform that material into interaction and output; linguistic and cultural competence emerge through guided analysis of media texts; motivation and engagement energize and sustain learner participation; and technological–pedagogical support provides the conditions under which all of this can occur systematically and equitably. The framework therefore synthesizes principles from second language acquisition theory, motivational psychology, and digital pedagogy into an integrated model for designing immersive learning environments that reflect the realities of contemporary digital life

4.12. Contribution to language policy and pedagogical innovation

The study contributes to language pedagogy and higher education policy in several ways. First, it provides empirical data on how Indonesian undergraduates are already using media to learn languages, offering an evidence base for policy shifts toward technology-enhanced learning. Second, it introduces an actionable curriculum framework grounded in both learner behavior and educational theory. Third, it recognizes and formalizes informal learning practices—e.g., binge-watching, subtitling, fan translation—as valuable components of modern language acquisition. The results

underline the feasibility, desirability, and partial success of virtual immersion in foreign language instruction. However, they also highlight the necessity of intentional curricular integration, sustained interaction, instructor mediation, and equitable technological access to ensure that virtual immersion evolves from an extracurricular enhancement into a robust, embedded element of university language education.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of virtual immersion—encompassing streaming media, language learning applications, and social platforms—as an informal yet substantively impactful supplement to formal foreign language education in Indonesian higher education. Grounded in theoretical frameworks from Second Language Acquisition, task-based learning, and motivational psychology, and drawing on empirical data from 164 multilingual university students, this research provides evidence of how digital environments shape linguistic development and foster intercultural awareness.

The findings indicate that students are actively engaged in dynamic, multimodal language exposure beyond the classroom. Platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, and various language applications were found to be instrumental in developing vocabulary, reinforcing grammatical recognition, and enhancing cultural familiarity. These informal learning tools provide frequent and meaningful input, aligning with established principles such as Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis and Schmidt's noticing hypothesis. However, productive linguistic skills, particularly oral proficiency, demonstrated limited development without structured interactive tasks and corrective feedback, underscoring the critical role of pedagogical scaffolding and instructor facilitation.

While students reported heightened motivation and engagement through personalized content consumption—highlighting the significance of autonomy in digital learning—the study also identified substantial institutional barriers. These include insufficient teacher training in technology integration, a lack of formal assessment mechanisms for digital learning, and unequal access to technological resources. In response to these findings, this research proposes a five-component Virtual Immersion Integration Framework, designed to systematically bridge informal immersion practices with structured academic curricula.

This study offers several distinct contributions to the field. It provides a detailed, contextualized analysis of Generation Z students' autonomous digital language learning behaviors within Indonesia. Furthermore, it advances theoretical application by synthesizing insights from sociocultural theory and motivational psychology into a scalable curriculum model. Most significantly, it advocates for a paradigm shift in pedagogical perspective, recognizing student-driven digital experiences not as distractions, but as legitimate and potent avenues for language acquisition.

The implications of this research extend to language education policy, curriculum design, and professional teacher development. To fully leverage the potential of virtual immersion, institutions must commit to investing in robust digital infrastructure and

fostering pedagogical innovation. Educators should be empowered to assume roles as curators, facilitators, and co-learners within digitally mediated learning processes. Future research should pursue longitudinal investigations into the effects of virtual immersion on oral proficiency, examine its implementation across diverse institutional contexts, and develop validated metrics for assessing the development of intercultural competence in digital environments.

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