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The Low Connection Between Informal Digital Learning of English and Willingness to Communicate: Investigating the "Scrolling Phenomenon" and Speaking Challenges among EFL Vocational Students

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Abstract
Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) provides extensive authentic input; however, its casual digital register often diverges from the formal sociopragmatic requirements of vocational contexts. This study investigates the impact of such informal exposure on Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among 229 vocational school students. To address self-report bias, the data were collected using a situated measurement protocol through a validated 15-item questionnaire that measured Receptive IDLE (consuming content), Productive IDLE (creating content), and WTC, following industry-specific simulations that anchored WTC in a professional rather than social context. Descriptive analysis revealed a "scrolling" phenomenon: students were highly engaged in receptive activities like watching TikTok/Instagram Reels (M = 3.08), but showed low engagement in productive activities such as online chatting (M = 2.31). Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between Receptive IDLE and WTC ($r = 0.260$, $p < 0.01$) and a negligible correlation between Productive IDLE and WTC ($r = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$). Rather than dismissing these weak correlations as negligible, this study interprets them as empirical evidence of a pragmatic dissonance, that is, a critical gap in which informal digital pragmatic linguistic gains fail to transfer into professional

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sociopragmatic competence. The findings suggest that while 'scrolling' and 'posting' increase familiarity, they do not inherently build professional confidence. Therefore, it is suggested that educators bridge this dissonance through a mixed or combined pedagogical approach that integrates explicit register awareness with task-based vocational simulations to transform informal digital input into professionally competent output.

Keywords: *informal digital learning of English, pragmatic dissonance, sociopragmatic competence, vocational English (ESP), willingness to communicate*

INTRODUCTION

English language skills have evolved from being merely an academic subject to becoming a vital component for job prospects (Datu & Sulindra, 2024; Hidayat, 2024; Huynh, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Purwati et al., 2023). The vocational school programs are designed to prepare graduates for immediate workforce entry by integrating digital materials to foster effective communication. However, these programs face a unique challenge, that is the English required for professional contexts, such as handling clients and technical reporting, often contrasts with the casual, colloquial English students encounter in their daily digital lives (Lee & Sylvén, 2021; Purwati et al., 2023; Santi & Endarto, 2024).

The spread of advanced internet tools and platforms that have transformed the way users interact with the web has redefined the boundaries of language learning, enabling a paradigm shift from teacher-led instruction to learner-driven autonomy (Lai, 2017; Richards, 2015). In the Indonesian context, where formal education is often constrained by teacher-centered pedagogies (Mudra, 2020; Sulistiyo, 2016), students increasingly rely on informal digital practices as their primary source of authentic language exposure. Consequently, these self-directed digital habits are not merely supplementing but often overshadowing traditional textbook-based learning (Lee & Drajati, 2019; Sockett, 2014). This shift indicates a transition toward a more autonomous "ecological" approach to language acquisition (van Lier, 2000), where students prioritize authentic, interest-based content over the structured, often decontextualized, grammar found in traditional curricula. This domination of informal learning creates a unique challenge for formal

institutions. When digital habits become the primary source of linguistic input, the classroom risks being perceived as secondary or even disconnected from the real-world English that students value. However, the fact that these habits overshadow traditional methods does not mean the classroom is outdated. Instead, it suggests that the role of the teacher is evolving from a primary provider of input to a facilitator who must help students navigate, organize, and validate the massive amounts of informal data they are consuming independently.

In the Indonesian context, a challenge lies in the disconnect between the quantity of language exposure and the quality of communicative practice (Lee & Drajati, 2022; Permana & Rohmah, 2024; Hidayani et al., 2025; Titania & Ashadi, 2024; Drajati & Kurniawati, 2023; Sari & Hidayat, 2024; Putra & Yusuf, 2025). Loewen and Sato (2018) state that formal instruction often focuses on grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension, leaving little room for the spontaneous interaction required to build communicative competence. Therefore, even though today's vocational students fit the profile of Prensky's (2001) *Digital Natives*, characterized by constant connectivity, this immersion does not necessarily translate into academic or professional competence. Consequently, students may possess high digital fluency yet lack the specific register awareness needed for professional achievement. To fill this gap, educators and researchers have increasingly turned their attention to Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) (Lee, 2020; Liu, Zhang & Zhang, 2023; Rezai, 2023; Toffoli, Sockett & Kusyk, 2023; Soyoof et al., 2023).

Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) refers to self-directed English learning activities that occur outside the classroom, facilitated by digital technologies (Lee, 2019; Lee, 2021; and Lee & Dressman, 2018). Different from formal online courses, IDLE is driven by personal interest and often involves activities students would engage in for leisure, such as using social media, watching *YouTube* videos, playing online games, or listening to music (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). The common use of smartphones and affordable internet access has made these resources available to vocational students anytime and anywhere, theoretically creating an immersive

environment previously unavailable to foreign language learners (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Scholars such as Sockett (2014) describe this phenomenon as learning in *the digital wilds*, where learners navigate authentic language input without the scaffolding of a teacher. This exposure is critical for developing receptive competence, the ability to understand spoken and written English in natural contexts (Lai & Wang, 2025; Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2025; Lee & Drajati, 2019). However, the ultimate goal of vocational education is active communication. This brings the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) to the forefront.

Willingness to Communicate, originally conceptualized by McCroskey (1992), was adapted to L2 contexts by MacIntyre et al. (1998), who defined it as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person." They conceptualize WTC as a Six-Layered Heuristic Model (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The lower layers (IV–VI) represent firm, trait-like influences such as personality and intergroup climate. The middle layers (II–III) represent situated antecedents, including self-confidence and the desire to communicate with a specific person. At the top (Layer I) sits the immediate 'Willingness to Communicate' in a specific context."

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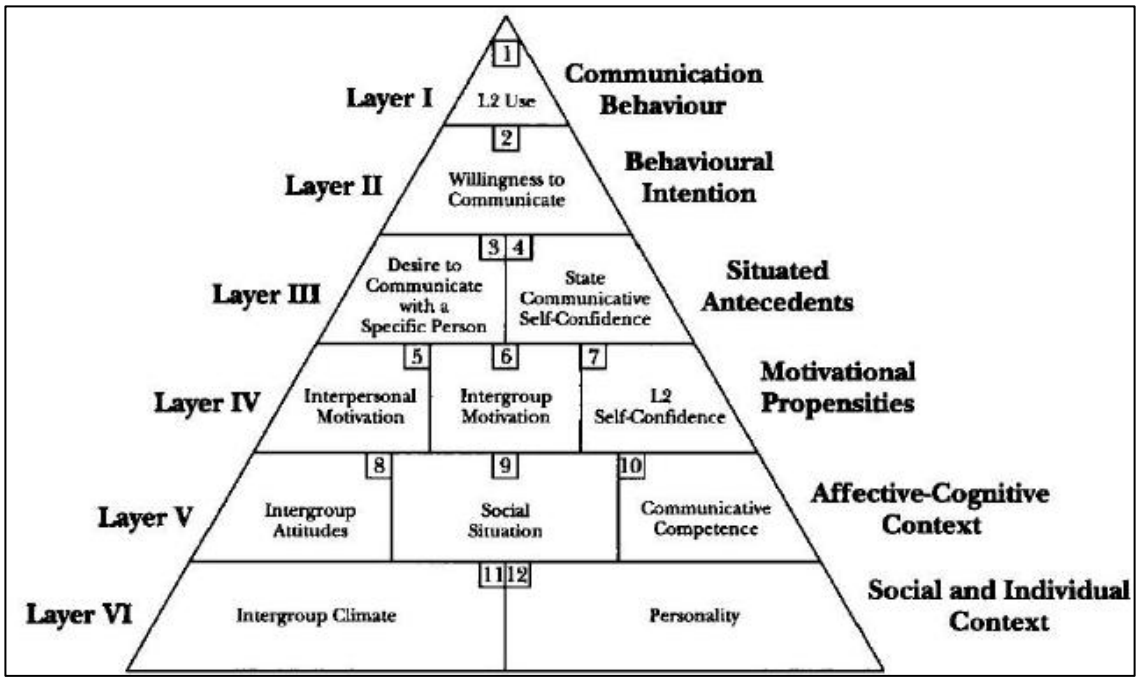
Figure. 1: Macintyre et al.'s (1998) Heuristics Model of Variables Influencing WTC



Referring to Figure 1, it is clear that the Heuristic Model of WTC posits that communication is the result of a complex interplay between situational variables, including the desire to communicate, state self-confidence, and enduring influences such as motivation, personality, and intergroup climate. This dynamic interaction is particularly evident in EFL contexts, where WTC is heavily influenced by the immediate security of the classroom environment (Peng & Woodrow, 2010) and the situational context of the interaction (Kang, 2005).

In vocational education, WTC is the key because students are trained for specific trades requiring pragmatic and transactional communication (Kusni, 2013; Marwan, 2016). However, anxiety remains a significant barrier, as Ariyanti (2016) notes that Indonesian EFL classrooms often induce psychological pressure. While IDLE theoretically offers a low-stakes environment, the privacy of digital learning can act as a support. Mulyono and Saskia (2021) observed that anxiety often persists even in digital settings, preventing active output. Consequently, vocational students' engagement in the English environment remains low despite digital access (Listiani et al., 2020). It strengthens

Widodo's (2016) argument that without structured pedagogical intervention, students struggle to bridge the gap between passive consumption and professional communication.

Despite the affordances of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), it remains uncertain whether these input-heavy activities translate into effective communicative output. Research in this area has yielded diverse results. For instance, Lee and Sylvén (2021) identified a positive correlation between digital engagement and WTC among learners in Sweden and South Korea. However, this study indicates that the observed scrolling phenomenon is architecturally mediated by the digital ecology itself, rather than being just a personal habit (Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2024). Platforms' affordances, like *TikTok* algorithms, are designed to prioritize passive consumption, discouraging active engagement (Taylor & Chen, 2024; Khulwa et al., 2025). The inherent public visibility of these spaces also creates pressure to perform (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2021), which transforms digital interaction into a spectacle (Schellewald, 2025). For vocational school students, this high-stakes environment triggers fears of negative evaluation and digital anxiety (Jiang, 2018), causing creators to conform to algorithmic requirements (Herman, 2023) rather than engaging in the low-stakes sociopragmatic exploration necessary for effective L2 development.

On the other hand, other researchers, like Nasution (2022), have found that integrating social media into structured classroom learning remains difficult due to the risk of distraction and non-academic use. Additionally, Zeng, S., & Della, C. (2024) found that systematic guidelines are needed to ensure new media tools (*YouTube* or *Instagram*), are not just trendy add-ons and are purposefully aligned with industry-specific ESP goals. Therefore, the digital platforms intended to support learning English conversation practices should be pivoted to workplace communication tasks. In relation to the engagement, Fang et al. (2025) demonstrated roles of affective and emotional factors in shaping digital natives' informal English learning behaviour; notably, only productive IDLE activities, grit, self-confidence, and motivation emerged as key factors predicting students' willingness to communicate (Lee & Drajati, 2019). These factors fully mediate the

relationship between digital nativity and IDLE intention, alongside desire and online learning self-efficacy.

Receptive IDLE involves consuming content, such as watching YouTube videos, scrolling through Instagram feeds, or listening to podcasts (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Ermawati et al., 2024; Silviyanti, 2014). This form of input is crucial for incidental vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. On the contrary, productive IDLE involves creating content, such as posting comments, writing blogs, or engaging in voice chats in online games (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). While receptive activities lower the affective filter by allowing private consumption, productive activities require a higher level of risk-taking and linguistic formulation, often triggering significant anxiety even in digital environments (Sholeh & Muchibuddin, 2025; Iftanti, 2023; Hanifah et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on IDLE and WTC, several gaps remain. First, vocational school students whose communicative needs focus on pragmatics are often overlooked in IDLE-WTC studies, in favor of the general secondary population. Second, existing studies often treat digital engagement as a single construct, overlooking the critical distinction between receptive IDLE (passive consumption) and productive IDLE (active creation/interaction). These modes likely shape communicative readiness in different ways. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: Is there any relationship between receptive and productive IDLE and Willingness to Communicate?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a quantitative correlational design to measure the degree of association or relationship between Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Willingness to Communicate using statistical data (Creswell, 2012). This design allows for the identification of trends and relationships within language learning behaviors without manipulating the variables, a common practice in applied linguistics research (Dörnyei, 2009; Al-Hoorie, A. H., 2018). The research was conducted at a vocational high school

located in East Jakarta, Indonesia, for its integrated-technology curriculum and diverse student body.

The population included students from various vocational majors, specifically *Accounting, Office Administration, Computer Engineering*, and *Visual Communication Design*. Through purposive sampling, a total of 229 active EFL students were recruited based on their accessibility and status. The study uses self-reported questionnaire data but took steps to enhance ecological validity. The survey was conducted after industry-specific simulations to capture the "situated WTC", not as a stable personality trait, but as a state of psychological readiness triggered by the sociopragmatic performance. They also capture the perceived communicative competence and situated anxiety that serve as the gatekeeper to Layer II of MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) Heuristic Model. Even though this preparedness is primarily assessed through self-reports rather than direct workplace actions, this readiness is a necessary precursor for effective L2 use in professional contexts. Therefore, the instrument evaluates a reflective intent shaped by the situated reality of the vocational environment rather than a hypothetical willingness.

Demographic data indicated a primary age range of 16–17 years with relatively balanced gender distribution, ensuring that the findings reflect the experiences of both male and female vocational students. Regarding the situated WTC, the industry-specific simulations (Table 1) were arranged based on each major. The tasks, ranging from technical troubleshooting to formal correspondence, prompt participants to perceive professional demands. By positioning the survey as a post-performance assessment, the data more reflect the students' vocational readiness.

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Table 1. A Summary of Simulations Tailored to Specific Industries

Simulation Task	Vocational Major	Targeted Vocational Register	Pragmatic Focus
Troubleshooting	Computer Engineering	Formal	Moving from digital "slang" to technical accuracy
Financial Briefing	Accounting	Formal	Accuracy in reporting and the use of polite, formal markers in peer-to-supervisor interaction.
Client Consultation	Visual Communication Design	Consultative	Navigating the power dynamic between "expert" and "client" using deferential politeness.
Formal Correspondence	Office Administration	Formal	Transitioning from "instant messaging" habits to structured, formal business genres.

Data were collected via *Google Forms* after all participants within each major completed their respective simulated tasks. The instrument consisted of two main sections: (1) The IDLE Scale, adapted from Lee and Drajati (2019), featuring 10 items divided into *Receptive* and *Productive* sub-scales; and (2) The WTC Scale, adapted from MacIntyre et al. (1998), containing 5 items measuring willingness to speak in various contexts. The use of self-reported scales is grounded in the psychological nature of the constructs, as a learner's self-perception of competence and IDLE engagement serves as a linguistically associated predictor (Lee & Drajati, 2019). to confirm the quality of the data, the instruments underwent rigorous validity and reliability testing using SPSS 25. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding strong coefficients for IDLE Receptive sub-scale ($\alpha = 0.825$), the IDLE Productive sub-scale ($\alpha = 0.748$), and the WTC scale ($\alpha = 0.812$).

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RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis highlights how vocational students engage with digital English practices, specifically highlighting a distinct gap between receptive and productive engagement (Table 1). Within receptive IDLE, students displayed clear preferences for specific media formats. The most frequent activities were *'Watching short videos on YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *Instagram Reels*, (*M* = 3.08, *SD* = 1.21). The relatively high standard deviation suggests a significant variance in frequency among students, indicating that while short-form video in dominant source of input for many, it is not yet a common habit. *'Listening to English songs'* was also popular (*M=3.20*), reflecting music's roles as a widely accessible source of input. In contrast, "*Listening to podcasts"* was the least favored activity (*M = 1.58, SD = 0.80*). This difference between short-form visual content and long-form audio indicates that the students rely heavily on visual cues to process English (Mayer, 2009). Without the scaffolding provided by visual context, learner comprehension and engagement appear to drop significantly, which aligns with the "scrolling phenomenon" discussed earlier.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of IDLE Activities and Willingness to Communicate

Variable / Indicator	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation	Category
IDLE Receptive (Aggregate)	**3.08**	**0.82**	**Moderate**
Watching short videos (YouTube/TikTok)	3.45	0.95	High
Listening to English songs	3.20	0.91	High
Reading social media captions	3.05	0.88	Moderate
Listening to podcasts	1.85	0.76	Low
IDLE Productive (Aggregate)	**2.31**	**0.79**	**Low**
Chatting online (text-based)	2.55	0.92	Low
Posting status updates/comments	2.20	0.84	Low

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Variable / Indicator	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation	Category
Speaking in online voice calls/games	1.95	0.81	Very Low
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	**2.89**	**0.85**	**Moderate**
Speaking English freely	3.36	1.00	Moderate
Discussing trending topics with classmates	3.05	1.00	Moderate
Presenting in front of many people	3.03	1.08	Moderate
Speaking in front of the classroom	3.00	1.01	Moderate
Discussing in a group	2.97	1.00	Moderate

The Pearson correlation analysis (Table 3) revealed two key patterns in how digital English learning habits relate to students' willingness to communicate. First, receptive IDLE activities (such as watching or listening) showed a statistically significant but weak positive relationship with WTC ($r = 0.260, p < 0.05$). This indicates that students who engage more in receptive digital practices tend to be slightly more willing to communicate in English. Second, the link between productive IDLE activities (such as posting or creating content) and WTC was even weaker, though still statistically significant ($r = 0.139, p = 0.05$). In other words, while both types of digital engagement are related to WTC, receptive activities appear to have a stronger influence than productive ones. These results provide the empirical basis for the pragmatic dissonance interpreted in the following Discussion section.

Table 3. The Pearson Correlation Analysis (N=229)

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
IDLE Receptive ↔ WTC	**0.260****	**0.000**	**Weak Positive Correlation**
IDLE Productive ↔ WTC	**0.139***	**0.036**	**Very Weak Positive Correlation**

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Interpreting the "*Scrolling*" Phenomenon: Receptive IDLE and WTC

The findings suggest that vocational students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is significantly shaped by their engagement in receptive IDLE, particularly through "scrolling" activities such as watching short videos and browsing social media feeds. This dominance of receptive engagement aligns with the observations of Godwin-Jones (2011), who noted that mobile devices are primarily utilized for content consumption rather than creation. Nevertheless, it can foster familiarity, confidence, and enjoyment in language use that boosts general WTC (Huang & Li, 2024), but without explicit register instruction, it does not automatically translate into professional communicative confidence.

This pattern reflects a broader trend in recent studies that learners gravitate toward multimodal, visually rich content that lowers the affective filter and provides accessible input (Lai & Wang, 2025; Drajati & Kurniawati, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the reliance on platforms like *TikTok* and *Instagram Reels* and other digital applications indicates that students depend heavily on visual scaffolding to process English, echoing Mayer's (2009) multimedia learning theory (Harianja et al., 2025; Sitompul & Yunita, 2025), as well as to support the learning process (Rahman et al., 2023).

The statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.260$) between these receptive habits and WTC supports Sockett's (2014) revisiting of the Input Hypothesis in digital contexts. Sockett argues that the digital wilds provide authentic, low-stakes input that gradually builds a learner's internal linguistic system. Furthermore, as noted by Nguyen and Tan (2023) and Fang et al. (2023), digital exposure enhances vocabulary recognition and listening comprehension, which in turn supports communicative confidence. Students can enjoy English content without the pressure of immediate production, which reduces anxiety but limits opportunities to practice spontaneous communication. However, the effect remains limited because receptive activities are largely private and low-risk.

This limitation explains why the findings diverge slightly from Lee and Sylvén (2021), who observed a stronger link between digital engagement and communicative behaviour in Swedish learners. In their research, high levels of digital consumption significantly predicted active L2 usage. This difference may be attributed to the stark difference between the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context of Indonesia and the environment in Sweden, where English is so integrated into daily life that it functions more like a second language (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). For Indonesian vocational students, the English encountered on social media often remains "noise" or entertainment rather than a tool for communication, limiting its direct transferability to WTC.

Consequently, while the scrolling phenomenon serves as a gateway to authentic English, it does not automatically translate into workplace-ready communicative competence. As recent studies emphasize (Sari & Hidayat, 2024; Putra & Yusuf, 2025), pedagogical mediation is required to bridge the gap. Without scaffolding to connect receptive habits with productive tasks, such as role-plays or workplace simulations, students risk remaining passive consumers of English rather than confident communicators in professional contexts.

The Productive Inconsistency: Why Students Don't Speak

The findings reveal a critical pedagogical inconsistency, that is, vocational students' engagement in Productive IDLE activities shows a negligible or little significant correlation ($r = 0.139$) with Willingness to Communicate. This weak correlation is illustrated through a Modified WTC Pyramid (see Figure 2). The IDLE serves as the pragmatic foundation at the base of the model, spanning the *Social/Individual Context* (Layer VI) and *Affective-Cognitive Context* (Layer V). Together, these layers create what may be defined as the IDLE Register or the inputs. Theoretically, these challenge the output hypothesis, which posits that producing language is essential for fluency (Sockett, 2014). Yet, despite consuming large amounts of English input, participants rarely engaged in productive digital

acts. This low engagement contradicts the popular "Digital Native" narrative proposed by Prensky (2001), which assumes that this generation is inherently composed of active digital creators. Instead, the results align with the critique offered by Bennett et al. (2008), who warned against assuming that a generation's familiarity with technology is associated with a sophisticated ability to use it for learning or communication.

Several factors explain this reluctance to transform exposure into active use. First, the nature of the platforms themselves may discourage production. Short-form media like *TikTok* or *Instagram Reels* are designed for rapid scrolling and passive engagement, not extended interaction. As Fang et al. (2023) argue, passive digital consumption fosters vocabulary recognition but does little to build productive confidence. Second, risk-taking in productive tasks is inherently higher than in receptive ones. Speaking or writing requires learners to verbalize language in real time, exposing them to mistakes or errors and peer judgment. This is consistent with the *Foreign Language Anxiety* model described by Peng and Woodrow (2010), which identifies situational anxiety as a significant deterrent to classroom participation. Within the digital realm, text like comments, posts may actually increase anxiety for students who fear their grammatical errors will be permanent online.

For vocational students, who are likely to be professionals, this digital visibility can become a source of interference. The threat of being judged by peers or potential employers due to a misspelled word or incorrect tense can trigger a high level of affective filter, causing students to withdraw and become passive rather than engage in active communication. Consequently, while social media offers vast opportunities for learning, its public and permanent nature may unintentionally reinforce the anxiety that prevents students from moving from receptive input to productive, confident output.

Indonesian scholars confirm this, noting that vocational students frequently experience high anxiety when asked to produce English in public settings (Yunus et

al., 2024; Mustamir, 2024). Other recent studies also confirm this trend, such as Melansari et al. (2025), who identified Indonesian students' difficulties in speaking, and Subekti & Glory (2022) reported Indonesian high school students' fear of negative evaluation factors. Similar findings have also emerged. Zadorozhny and Lee (2025) similarly demonstrated that IDLE only enhanced WTC when mediated by learners' belief in their communicative ability. Pérez-Verdugo & Barandiaran. (2023), also emphasized that while digital platforms foster autonomy and receptive competence, productive engagement is limited by anxiety and fear of mistakes. That highlights that the productive inconsistency is that students consume English extensively in digital environments, but hesitate to speak. The root causes are fear of negative evaluation, lack of self-efficacy, and platform design favouring passive engagement (Alhaourani et al., 2025; Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2025; Fang et al., 2023; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021).

The weak correlation identified in this study might be mediated by Indonesian sociocultural norms that suppress the transfer of digital confidence to professional settings. In the Indonesian vocational context, high power distance dictates that communication with superiors or instructors should follow hierarchical protocol. It is different from IDLE, which promotes an egalitarian, peer-to-peer social register. Therefore, the transition to a professional simulation requires a level of formal politeness that students may find sociopragmatically risky. This risk can cause a fear of negative evaluation and anxiety (Jiang, 2018). For vocational school students, the act of speaking in a professional context is not only a linguistic challenge but also a performative one. Sociocultural pressure acts as a gatekeeper, potentially delaying the progression from receptive digital input to productive output. Therefore, high digital engagement is not connected to communicative readiness. The students' communicative confidence is limited to informal digital contexts and does not transfer to the formal vocational register. Besides, although digital platforms reduce anxiety and make communication more conducive,

speaking anxiety remains a concern due to classroom formality, fear of mistakes, and sociocultural expectations (Mulyono & Saskia, 2021).

The existing affective barriers reflect an underlying pragmatic dissonance. Within the framework of Macantyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid, the *Self-Confidence* (Layer IV) refined through IDLE is often specific to a particular context and does not seamlessly transfer when the students encounter the formal requirements of the workplace that differ from their informal digital experiences. This sociopragmatic mismatch creates a situated or temporary blockage at Layer III, hindering the transition from digital input to professional output. This situation highlights the importance of effective scaffolding. Implementing task-based learning, role-playing, and workplace simulations can foster safe environments for students to take risks, thereby bridging this dissonance and gradually transforming passive learners into confident communicators.

Contextual Mismatch: Vocational and Pragmatic Dissonance

The "situated" nature of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) provides a valuable theoretical foundation for these results; the findings suggest a necessary extension of the model in particular for the vocational school context. As illustrated in Figure 2, the transition from informal digital exposure to professional output is not automatic, but mediated (Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2023). Although the IDLE Register is unavoidably embedded within the learner's *Social and Individual Context* (Layer IV) and *Affective-Cognitive Context* (Layer V), it remains limited to informal scopes, and it is unsuccessful to infuse the *Situated Antecedent* (*Layer III: Desire to Communicate with a specific person*) in a vocational setting. This can be called a 'bottleneck', where pragmatic dissonance occurs, that is, students have the digital input (*Base*), but lack the sociopragmatic confidence to reach the top (Layer I: *Decision to Communicate*) when the context shifts from casual social media to professional vocational

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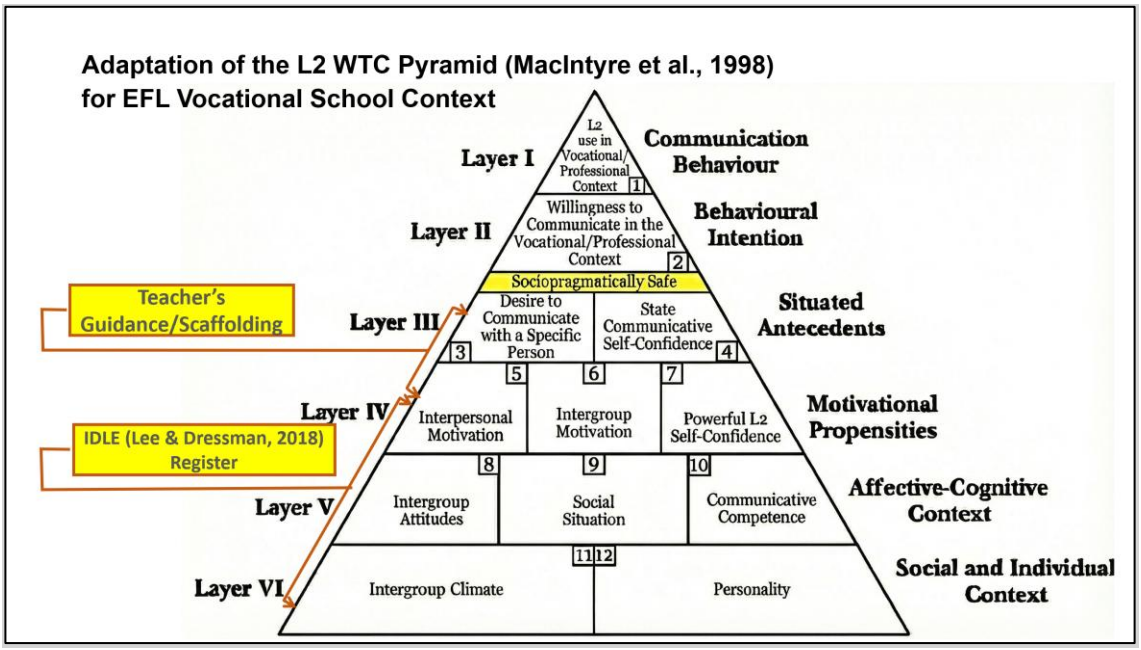
Figure 2. A Modification of the L2 WTC Pyramid



While IDLE offers important exposure to authentic input that can enhance grammatical competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Lee & Dressman, 2018), there is a suggestion that this exposure may not fully support the development of sociopragmatic competence required for the vocational register. This study underscores that informal digital consumption, such as watching *YouTube* or scrolling social media, tends to be less effective in delivering the nuanced, situation-specific information needed for a vocational setting (Arndt & Woore, 2018).

This observation indicates that confidence may be somewhat fragmented by register; specifically, students often demonstrate digital fluency in informal settings, but encounter challenges when asked to utilize that knowledge in non-digital, formal contexts (Drajati et al., 2024). This fragmentation can lead to a form of pragmatic dissonance, which serves as a situational filter at Layer III (State Self-Confidence). Consequently, even when the students have access to the linguistic tools common in digital communication, the mismatch in registers can hinder their Willingness to Communicate (Layer II). Therefore, these findings highlight the need

for better teachers' guidance in informal digital production to cultivate the safe sociopragmatic depth required for professional communicative readiness.

Vocational students in this study are pragmatically focused on employability, yet a significant gap exists between their digital inputs and required outputs. Interpreted through Halliday's (1978) *Register Theory*, students appear to be acquiring a *digital register* characterized by casual tenor and slang, which is fundamentally distinct from the *vocational register* required in the workplace. Recent research confirms that this reliance on informal digital learning often leads to pragmatic failure, where learners unintentionally transfer casual norms into professional contexts, and the effectiveness depends on how educators engage with the institutional context and the balance between opportunities and risks (Altakhaineh et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2020). Al- Zoubi (2025) further warns that without explicit instruction, students lack the ability to code-switch, leaving them "mute" in formal situations.

However, this low connection may not reflect a permanent deficiency but rather a stage of development. Jannah et al. (2024), utilizing narrative inquiry, found that for Indonesian EFL learners, the transition from IDLE to active WTC is a gradual process built through specific platform interactions rather than an immediate transfer. This suggests that while students are engaging with digital content, the leap to speaking requires a step-by-step accumulation of familiarity and comfort. This observation is supported by recent statistical evidence, which clarifies the mechanism of this transition. Studies by Zadorozhnyy & Lee (2023) and Soyoof et al. (2023) demonstrate that IDLE does not always influence WTC directly; instead, it operates through the mediator of L2 self-efficacy. In this framework, Students may be accumulating linguistic input, a phase known as *receptive IDLE,* but have not yet reached the threshold of self-efficacy required to engage in productive communication or formal oral communication. Consequently, the weak correlation found in this study may simply highlight an inactive period where learners are cognitively processing input and building their self-belief. While waiting for a

student to perceive themselves as capable of using the language they have consumed, their willingness to speak will remain blocked, regardless of how much digital input they have received. This highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that are designed as register-specific activators. By using teacher feedback as the dominant source of self-efficacy (Setyaningsih et al., 2022), educators can lower the affective filter associated with formal vocational registers. This study focuses specifically on boosting learner confidence to activate the inactive knowledge gained through informal digital engagement.

The complexity of the findings may be further explained by the nature of learner engagement in digital spaces. Kruk (2022) emphasizes that WTC in digital contexts is highly situational and dynamic, often requiring prolonged engagement before stabilizing into active participation. Therefore, the weak correlation found in this study indicates that the vocational students are currently in the "accumulation phase". This phase is grounded in Krashen's (1982) classical theory, which argues that learners need "the Silent Period" to consume input and do not speak until they are ready and have built enough competence. This phase involves gaining knowledge to build skills. For vocational school students, this silent period may be extended as they move between the informal, slang-heavy English of social and the specialized, technical English of their future career. Therefore, a lack of immediate verbal output does not necessarily indicate a lack of learning. Instead, it may reflect a period of intensive cognitive processing, where students are accumulating digital input that has yet to reach the required proficiency for active, professional communication. Nevertheless, the students need clear teaching methods to turn their passive confidence into active speaking skills in vocational settings.

While this study did not utilize direct discourse analysis to measure pragmatic performance, the observed pragmatic dissonance provides a basis for inferring sociopragmatic failure that can be attributed to several different sources (Thomas, 1983, in Kawate-Mierzejewska, 2003). Additionally, Kawate-Mierzejewska (2003) highlights that learners of a second language need explicit guidance to understand

that pragmatic norms are different across languages, making awareness raising an important part of instruction. Therefore, the language learners should be given opportunities to acquire knowledge of the social and cultural conventions of the target language, in this context the in vocational settings. As a matter of fact, this study does not directly claim that students lack register awareness, but rather that their current digital habits are not translating into professional confidence. Therefore, the 'failure' in this study is interpreted as an internalized uncertainty regarding social appropriateness in a professional situation.

To bridge the gap between digital exposure and professional communication, students should engage in industry-specific simulations that require them to consciously switch from casual digital language to formal vocational registers. For example, they are asked to receive a slang-heavy customer complaint from social media and tasked with translating it into a formal technical report for their supervisor. This exercise helps them transition from first-person, emotive language to third-person, objective professional language. It provides a structured and safe environment for 'failing forward' as they learn the differences in pragmatic norms across languages, preparing them for future careers.

Regarding the pedagogical shift from passive exposure to active simulation, it creates a ground for future research. While this study identifies the dissonance through quantitative measures, the effectiveness of the bridge remains a hypothesis to be tested. It is recommended to explore this issue by utilizing qualitative methods, such as studies conducted by Drajati et al. (2025), Jannah et al. (2024), Nguyen (2026), and Hasto et al. (2023). These approaches could specifically examine how vocational students and language learners navigate the stylistic transition from digital colloquial speech to professional speech. Additionally, mixed-method studies could verify whether explicit pragmatic instruction acts as a moderator in the IDLE and learners' readiness to communicate relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a scrolling phenomenon where extensive digital engagement does not lead to professional willingness to communicate (WTC) due to pragmatic dissonance. In Indonesia, this transfer is hindered by power distance and sociocultural norms, causing students to view their informal digital language as inappropriate for formal contexts. To address this, educators should use instructional methods like genre-reformulation to help students convert informal digital input into professional output. By fostering active engagement through simulated workplace tasks, teachers can mitigate the challenges of register mismatch. Future research should shift from correlational designs to longitudinal quasi-experimental studies, along with qualitative inquiries to better understand students' experiences and the influence of sociocultural identities on their development from passive consumption to active professional communication.

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