

EFL STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-TIME ICT INTEGRATION IN RURAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores junior high school students' lived experiences of first-time Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration in English language learning in a rural area of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The study aims to understand how students in a rural area experience and make meaning of ICT-supported English instruction during their initial exposure to digital learning tools. Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with eight-grade students, using field notes and open-ended questions. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) students' positive experiences with ICT in language learning, (2) experiencing personal growth through ICT-Assisted Learning (3) challenges including technical issues, usability difficulties, and issues with understanding pronunciation from instructional videos, and (4) learning to adapt to ICT through guidance and practice. While students responded positively to ICT integration, findings suggest the need for adequate infrastructure and sustained instructional support and scaffolding. This study contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive digital education in under-resourced contexts and provides implications for ICT-based language teaching policies. The study demonstrates that meaningful ICT integration can foster positive learning experiences when supported by appropriate resources and pedagogical guidance.

Keywords: Eastern Indonesia, English language learning, ICT integration, Lived experiences, Rural education

A. INTRODUCTION

In 21st century education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed language learning by reshaping conventional pedagogical approaches. It introduces varieties of digital tools that encourage students' engagement and interactivity in the learning process (Henderson & Melluish, 2025). Tools such as language learning applications, videos, digital dictionaries, or online quizzes have become vital resources for both teachers and learners (Nkomo et al., 2021). These tools are not only valuable in

providing innovative ways for teaching and learning, but also facilitate students with rich and convenient access to authentic materials that enhance language exposure beyond the classroom (Ahmadi et al., 2018). Therefore, ICT has emerged as an essential aspect in English language education.

In Indonesian context, the importance of ICT integration has been further emphasized by Kurikulum Merdeka, which proactively encourages the implementation of ICT in teaching and learning process. This is stipulated in Permendikbud No. 37 Year 2018 about the changes of Kurikulum 2013 (previous Indonesian education curriculum) and strengthened by SK Kepala BSKAP No. 8 Year 2022 about English learning outcomes in Kurikulum Merdeka (current Indonesian education curriculum). These policies affirm that ICT integrated materials are recommended and are embedded in the core curriculum competencies of primary and secondary school levels. These documents also mandate educators to develop technology-based English instructional materials with a belief that such integration can enhance students' learning processes and performances. In line with the curriculum, Koelsoem and Kusmiyati (2024) assert that the improvement of Indonesian education quality must be aligned with the ICT advancement. Consequently, the appropriate use of ICT has a crucial role in creating efficient and effective education (Elmi et al., 2024). For instance, ICT has proven to positively impact students' learner motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency in well-resourced environments (Alshammari et al., 2018). This evidence underscores the positive potential of integrating ICT for improving many aspects of language learning, particularly when the infrastructure and the support system are adequate.

Nevertheless, the integration and effectiveness of ICT in English language classrooms remain uneven, especially in underdeveloped or resource-limited areas. Students in underdeveloped regions often face unique challenges. The issues include inadequate infrastructure, limited connectivity, varying levels of digital literacy, negative attitudes, and inadequate teacher training (Kagambe et al., 2024; Sithole & Mbukanma, 2024). These challenges can hinder effective ICT integration for students' learning. Thus, improving teachers' professional development by providing comprehensive teacher training, localized the content creation, and investing more on ICT resources are suggested to optimize the advantages of ICT-integrated learning (Mapisa & Makena, 2024). Despite these obstacles, many learners continue to engage with ICT in creative and purposeful ways. In this case, the teachers' role is significant because they need to do trial and error of using various web-based technologies that work best for the students' conditions (Kormos & Wisdom, 2021). Educators are also required to be creative by utilizing non-web-based tools such as LCD and tablet to support ICT based learning when the internet problem exist (Dewi et al., 2024). These examples demonstrate that students can adapt and repurpose available technologies to support their English language learning with sufficient motivation and support from the teachers.

Several previous studies had investigated the same topic. A mixed method study by Muhtar et al. (2021) asserted that university students in Makassar, Indonesia perceived ICT positively as a tool for learning English due to its significant benefits. In another context, Linh (2024) revealed that higher education students in Vietnam also demonstrated favorable perceptions regarding the ICT integration in their English learning. Another study added that vocational high school students also perceived the same positive attitudes towards the use of ICT for language learning (Dewi et al., 2024). While these previous studies have focused

on urban or technologically advanced settings, fewer studies have explored students' experiences and perceptions of ICT use in underdeveloped areas, where access and engagement are shaped by unique socioeconomic and educational challenges (Mtebe & Raisamo, 2014). In regions such as Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, where ICT adoption in schools is inconsistent, examining how students initially engage with ICT tools in English learning is crucial. Their insights could inform more inclusive educational policies and guide the development of equitable digital learning environments.

This research seeks to bridge the identified gaps by investigating the perspectives of students in an underdeveloped region of Indonesia regarding their initial engagement with ICT in English language learning. By concentrating on learners' insights, the research aims to explore their experience, illuminate the affordances and barriers of ICT use from their perspectives, and reveal their strategies to cope with the issues. Thus, the study is expected to enrich a more thorough understanding of digital integration in EFL education. The findings are presumed to shed light on policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers seeking to implement equitable and context-sensitive ICT interventions in linguistically and economically marginalized settings.

B. METHOD

This current research employs qualitative phenomenological research. This study is chosen due to the nature of phenomenology, which focuses on a specific context of a single phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Moreover, this study employs transcendental phenomenology which minimizes the researchers' viewpoints and prioritizes participants' perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers adopt this approach with a view to comprehending the experiences of students, with a particular emphasis on their insights concerning the essence of experiences towards the first-time incorporation of ICT in instructional practices. Subsequently, they proceed to describe the essence of this phenomenon. This study involved eighth-grade students from a junior high school in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia. The class consisted of 17 students aged between 13 and 14 years old, including 8 female students and 9 male students, who shared similar learning experiences within the same classroom context. Prior to the study, English instruction in the classroom had not incorporated ICT. To become familiar with the classroom context and students' learning environment, the researchers conducted five classroom visits, comprising two preliminary observations and three ICT-supported English-speaking lessons. The intervention integrated a range of digital tools and resources to support students' speaking development, including Wordwall for vocabulary and sentence-building activities, Canva presentations for instructional delivery and dialogue modelling, British Council conversation materials, and YouTube videos that provided authentic conversational input, pronunciation models, and warm-up activities through English songs.

Following the intervention, four students were selected through purposive sampling to participate in in-depth interviews. Consistent with phenomenological research, a small number of participants was chosen to facilitate a rich and in-depth exploration of their lived experiences. The interview participants consisted of three female students and one male student, all aged between 13 and 14 years old. Participants were selected based on three criteria: (1) full participation in the ICT-supported learning activities, (2) willingness to participate in the study, and (3) variation in English achievement levels, as reflected in their pre-test and post-test results. To capture diverse perspectives on the phenomenon, the selected participants represented higher, moderate, and lower achievement levels. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted at the end of the intervention to explore students' lived experiences and perspectives regarding their first experience of ICT-integrated English language learning.

In collecting the data, observation field notes and interview questions were used. The field notes were used to provide a comprehensive description of the context, participants' behaviors, and researchers' reflections which offers critical insights to understand the lived experiences of students (Creswell, 2018). In this study, field notes play an important role in supporting triangulation. It provides additional data sources that can be compared with the interview transcripts to capture impressions, emotional shade, and help the researchers to ensure the interpretation of meaning is accurate in phenomenological research (Cohen et al, 2011). For the interview, the researchers employed a semi-structured interview consisting of 10 open-ended questions adapted from Pertiwi and Rodliyah (2022). The interviews were designed to explore students' lived experiences and perspectives regarding their first experience of learning English through ICT-supported activities. The interview questions focused on students' initial encounters with ICT-integrated language learning, their engagement with various digital tools and resources, the perceived contribution of ICT to their speaking development, aspects of ICT-supported learning that they found most enjoyable, and the challenges they encountered during the learning process. Participants were also invited to describe the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. To facilitate richer and more authentic responses, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the participants' mother tongue, allowing them to express their experiences, thoughts, and feelings more freely and in greater depth. Across the four participants, the interviews generated approximately 30 minutes of audio-recorded data in total. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of participants' accounts and to facilitate the data analysis process.

To analyze the data, the researchers employed a reflective thematic analysis method proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This involves identifying patterns based on the provided data and is a critical process in which the researchers' perspectives influence the development of themes. There are six phases of this technique of data analysis, which are: (1) Familiarization with the data, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Generating initial themes, (4) Reviewing themes, (5) Refining, defining, and naming themes, (6) Writing up. This phenomenology research followed several major steps proposed by Creswell and Poth (2016) (see figure 1).

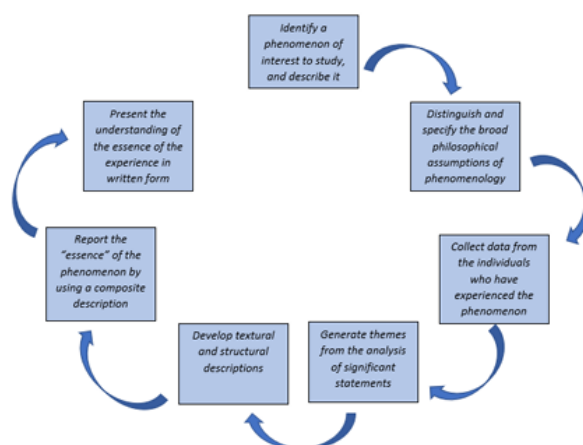


Figure 1. Steps in phenomenological research by Creswell and Poth (2016)

The first step involved determining the suitability of a phenomenological approach to address the research problem. The researchers identified the phenomenon of students' shared experiences in implementing technology-supported learning for speaking activities after the intervention. The researchers then defined the phenomenon by exploring students' learning activities, gained experiences, and perceptions during the intervention. In accordance with phenomenological principles, the researchers attempted to bracket their own experiences and

focused on students' objective experiences with ICT-based learning. Data were collected from students who experienced the phenomenon through individual interviews conducted via WhatsApp, considering students' communication limitations in expressing their ideas in group discussions. Classroom observation was also employed as a triangulation technique to confirm the consistency of the interview data. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify significant statements and generate themes related to students' experiences. The themes were then developed into textural and structural descriptions to explain what students experienced and how the phenomenon occurred. Finally, a composite description was constructed to represent the essence of students' experiences in ICT-based learning.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This segment presents the study's findings and discussions, which aimed to investigate the lived experiences of students in an undeveloped region who encountered ICT for the first time during their speaking class. The findings captured the voices, emotions, and reflections of students in an unfamiliar educational environment influenced by digital tools and resources. The results revealed four major themes to answer the research question (see figure 2).

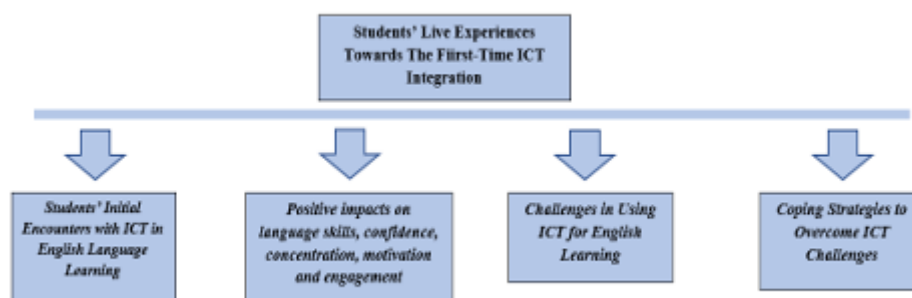


Figure 2. The result of themes generated

1. Students' positive encounters with ICT in English language learning

The findings reported respondents' positive initial encounter with ICT. The interview supported by the classroom observation showed alignment results, which uncovered that learners experienced a sense of excitement and curiosity when first introduced to ICT-based activities. Although initially they were unfamiliar with using digital tools in English lessons, field notes recorded that many students quickly responded positively to the new learning environment. This enthusiasm was further supported by the observation notes, where students showed active participation, particularly during game-based sentence arrangement tasks and video-based listening activities as the foundation for their speaking skills practices. Their positive emotions and experience were expressed by one of the participants by saying:

"It was fun and exciting, like following what was said in the video on the projector and playing games like arranging sentences."

(P1, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

In the observation, the participants were also observed eagerly engaging in question-and-answer sessions. The field notes recorded that the students were more active in raising their hands and not afraid of asking questions, aligning with P3's remark:

"I like asking questions or doing Q&A."

Moreover, these results revealed how the implementation of ICT created a new positive experience and environment as ICT boosted their excitement in learning English. The field notes indicated a high level of student engagement during English lessons. The learning environment was dynamic and interactive, with students actively participating, asking questions, and collaborating with their peers to complete the assigned tasks. This field notes aligns with the students' answer in the interview. The word "addictive" mentioned by P2 reflects the immersive quality of the experience that students feel.

"It felt more exciting and kind of addictive, but not in a bad way."

(P2, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

Furthermore, students' initial exposure to ICT not only delivered enthusiasm as seen in the field notes record, but also delivered meaningful changes in students' mindset and attitude towards English, particularly in the aspect of speaking. Students began to choose a specific favorite activity and shift their minds a step toward the opportunity provided by a new approach in the learning process by believing that it changes the way of thinking, particularly in learning English. This can be seen from the interview results:

"My way of thinking became a bit more open."

(P4, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

This highlight that the first-time use of ICT has contributed a lot to students' progressive thinking and exposed them to new experiences and perspectives, which may have encouraged a more open-minded attitude toward learning. It means the participants realized that multiple methods of learning English exist, and learning a new language is not that scary and could be fun.

2. Experiencing personal growth through ICT-Assisted Learning

The study also found that the participants felt the positive impacts on their language skills and confidence, concentration, motivation and engagement. The data from the interview and field notes revealed the same results. The participants agreed that their confidence in speaking, especially in the aspect of pronunciation, has increased. They also claimed that their willingness to speak publicly has improved. This was also shown in the classroom observation, where the students who initially were quite quiet gained confidence to participate and speak in the class activities. It means that they become less afraid of making mistakes, which is crucial for their speaking development.

"My pronunciation and confidence improved a bit."

(P4, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

"Now, if the teacher asks me to go to the front, I'm brave enough. Not like before."

(P2, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

They also noted that they became more engaged while participating in the speaking activities. They learned how to make sentences and identify wrong structures through the digital game, which increased their engagement recorded in the field notes where the class went from quiet to lively and exciting.

“We had to pronounce English words from the video, and arrange the wrong sentences in the game.”

(P3, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

The participants also agreed that learning speaking skills through ICT, particularly digital games, is more enjoyable contrasted to conventional methods. The field notes found that it is because the students can independently learn the language, choose their answers and see the correct answers immediately in a fun way. Meanwhile with the conventional method, the teacher becomes the epicenter of knowledge acquisition, and the activities are mostly lecturing and textbook based. Based on their answers, learning English through ICT has positively improved students' motivation.

“It's more fun than regular learning. You can choose your answers right away in the game.”

(P1, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

Moreover, the participants reported being more focused during lessons that incorporated interactive elements, such as challenges embedded in games or tasks presented through videos. This can also be seen in the field notes where students were focus when given the video and followed well to the instructions. One student noted,

“I could concentrate better through games or videos because there were challenges in the class activities.”

(P3, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

This suggests that the dynamic and stimulating nature of game based and audiovisual learning can capture students' focus more readily than traditional pedagogy. The presence of challenges appeared to motivate students to stay attentive and actively participate, cultivating a dynamic and interactive learner-centered environment.

3. Challenges in using ICT for English learning

Although many positive impacts have been felt by the participants, several challenges still exist. The first challenge is technical and usability difficulties. The participants mentioned that they did not know how the digital game worked. It was also in line with the recorded field notes that the researchers had to facilitate the participants to use the ICT tools and fully assist them in the learning process.

“At first, I didn't know how to make the game work.”

(P2, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

At the beginning of the learning activities, the field notes highlighted the participants' limited knowledge of how to use the game and the adoption of ICT resources, which hindered their ability to engage effectively. This result was strengthened by the participants'

interview. The participants agreed that using ICT for the first time was difficult due to their unfamiliarity with the technology.

"I didn't know how to fix it when something with the device didn't work."
(P1, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

This difficulty became more evident when technical issues arose during the activities, leaving participants unsure of how to troubleshoot or proceed. However, after the researchers provided clear guidance and demonstrated how to operate the ICT tools, the students gradually became more comfortable and began to enjoy the game. This shift suggests that targeted support and hands-on guidance are essential when introducing new technologies to learners with limited prior experience.

Another problem found in the field notes is difficulty in following the pronunciation of the native speakers. The students seem to pronounce what they heard but sometimes they looked confused and pronounced the words not very clearly. One respondent noted that:

"I was confused trying to follow the speakers' pronunciation in the video."
(P4, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

This response underscored an issue that was commonly experienced by the participants with limited exposure to authentic spoken English. The field notes showed that the rapid speech, varied accents, and unfamiliar pronunciation patterns made it difficult for students to grasp the spoken content effectively. This highlights the importance of incorporating more listening activities, slowed-down audio and phonetic or vocabulary support, and scaffolding particularly when using authentic video materials.

4. Learning to adapt to ICT through guidance and practice

In order to overcome the issues during the implementation of ICT, the participants revealed several coping strategies. One of the strategies is relying on teacher assistance. In the field notes, the students were recorded calling the researcher for help to assist when there were technical problems. This is supported by the participants' saying:

"I asked the teacher, and he gave me instructions. So, I followed him."
(P2, personal communication, May 1, 2025)

"If something didn't work, I asked my teacher."
(P4, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

According to the field notes, the novel tools in learning was sometimes difficult to operate for students who did not used to use ICT. Furthermore, challenges often appear to particular students. It was revealed that the teacher's role in teaching when using ICT was not only simply directly into the content provided, but also as a guide in leading students. This resulted in students' independence in the future, enabling them to operate the ICT tools by trial and error and repetition on their own.

"At first, I needed help. But after trying several times, I didn't need help anymore."
(P3, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

However, the observation results showed that for students who are familiar with ICT tools, the existing knowledge helps them to operate the ICT tools without major issues. This result revealed that students are leveraging existing tech skills in the learning process.

“Because I’m used to using a phone, I found the game easier to use.”

(P1, personal communication, May 1, 2025).

Based on the findings above, this study revealed that the participants showed positive perspectives towards the use of ICT in learning English. It was asserted that the utilization of ICT has resulted in a paradigm shift in students’ conception about learning English, perceiving it as an enjoyable and fun experience rather than burdensome and stressful one. The participants’ excitement suggests that ICT functioned not only as a learning tool but also as a novel educational experience that disrupted their previous perceptions of English learning. This finding aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989), which suggests that positive perceptions of technology influence users’ attitudes toward its adoption. For many participants, ICT represented a new learning experience that made English learning more engaging and enjoyable. As a result, students developed more positive attitudes toward both the technology itself and the process of learning English. This corresponds to Perdomo et al. (2022) who discovered that students experienced positive emotion while learning English through digital applications such as Duolingo, and videogames. Another study also revealed that ICT integration had a favorable impact on the respondents’ attitudes and acknowledged its effectiveness in facilitating student learning (Eryansyah & Erlina, 2023). This is primarily due to tangible enhancement in the English proficiency of the participants after integrating ICT. For instance, 78,1% of the students can improve their listening skills, and 73% students can improve grammar competence after using ICT for their learning (Al Arif et al., 2023). As speaking skills are productive skills, listening skills and grammar competence became crucial to support speaking development. Thus, problems such as difficulties to follow the native speakers’ pronunciation in the authentic materials given can be encountered which led students to have positive experience on the usage of ICT.

With regard to preliminary interactions, the integration of video and gaming elements within ICT interventions has yielded favorable results. The positive responses toward video and gaming elements suggest that participants’ first encounters with ICT served as meaningful learning experiences that reshaped their perceptions of English learning. Consistent with Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (1984), participants constructed new understandings of English learning through direct engagement with ICT-based activities, leading them to perceive learning as more enjoyable and accessible than before. The novelty of interacting with videos and games appeared to stimulate curiosity and active participation, transforming English learning from a potentially stressful experience into a more engaging one. Nevertheless, previous studies have highlighted challenges associated with ICT adoption among learners in rural and under-resourced contexts, including limited digital literacy, inadequate technological infrastructure, and technology-related anxiety, which may hinder learners’ engagement with digital learning environments (Al-Huneini et al., 2020; Rahayu et al., 2026; Mac Callum et al., 2014). Some of these contextual challenges were also evident among the participants in the present study due to their geographical location and limited prior exposure to technology. However, unlike the concerns reported in previous studies, the participants demonstrated positive engagement and enthusiasm during ICT-based learning activities. This suggests that despite existing constraints, appropriate guidance and support

can help learners benefit from ICT integration. Therefore, sustained assistance and structured implementation are necessary to ensure that students can maximize the educational benefits of ICT for their language learning development.

Furthermore, the participants in the present study reported overwhelmingly positive experiences during their initial exposure to ICT, suggesting that well-supported ICT integration can foster meaningful and enjoyable language learning experiences even among first-time users. This finding is consistent with the results obtained by Poudel (2022), who revealed that ICTs have a strong influence on language learning, particularly through the use of videos and exercise applications. Poudel further argued that these technologies were great in providing significant learning resources, helping teachers to prepare and present their lessons, and for enabling peer collaboration in learning practices. Moreover, a survey study also shared the same essence. Students believed that ICT-based learning contributed to the learning process (Amrullah et al., 2023; Kucuk, 2023). Consequently, the findings suggest that introducing ICT to learners with limited prior exposure to technology may contribute to a more engaging learning environment when adequate pedagogical support and guidance are provided.

This study also highlighted positive impacts of ICTs on language skills especially pronunciation, confidence, concentration, motivation, and engagement. By employing the technology, students showed the engagement in speech recognition. ICT can also make the classroom more flexible and communicative, which boosted students' engagement while learning English (Wati et al., 2025). Despite the implementation of video and game in this study, another study related to speech recognition using AI technology speech program named Speechling. The findings demonstrate the efficacy of such technology and offer significant insights. By implementing this technology, after pre and post-test learners who practiced with the AI demonstrated significant improvement in their pronunciation in speaking skills. Moreover, in terms of confidence some studies reported the effect of ICTs on students' confidence (Bashori, et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). It suggests that the implementation of ICT improved students' speech recognition not only on proficiency but also on confidence and anxiety in delivering speech. Nevertheless, Eryansyah and Erlina (2023) found that only a minority integrated ICT into their daily teaching routines. This discrepancy between perception and practice underscores the persistent barriers, such as an absence of facilities and resources, that continue to challenge the seamless adoption of ICT in English language teaching.

One of the prominent problems encountered in the beginning phase of ICT integration was related to technical and usability difficulties. This challenge primarily stemmed from a lack of technology knowledge and familiarity, particularly among learners and educators who have limited experience and exposure to digital tools. Similar findings reported that technological difficulties were identified as a significant hindrance that hampered junior high school students in Bengkulu, Indonesia, during the early stages of ICT adoption for English learning (Putri & Syafryadin, 2022). Such problems often result in the technical disruption and interruption that can impede the English learning process and effectiveness.

Following the pronunciation in the instructional videos was a major challenge for the participants in the early phase of ICT integration in English language learning. This difficulty stems from interrelated factors. The phonological differences between English and Indonesian are the major contributors of the pronunciation issue (Ristati et al., 2024).

Indonesian students often struggle with English sounds that do not exist in their native language, such as the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, as well as certain vowel contrasts. These phonemic discrepancies make it difficult for students to accurately perceive and reproduce English pronunciation, especially when relying merely on video materials without interactive feedback (Abdalgane & Idris, 2020).

Additionally, the effectiveness of video-based pronunciation learning depends on students' digital literacy and access to technology. In less developed areas, students may face challenges such as limited access to devices, poor internet connectivity, and unfamiliarity with digital learning platforms (Swandi et al., 2024; Yeh & Tsai, 2022). These obstacles hampered students' ability to engage with video content effectively and impede their pronunciation development. In contrast, research has shown that when students have sufficient access to technology and are guided in using interactive video lessons, their pronunciation proficiency may develop considerably. For example, studies revealed that organized video-based instructions, when integrated with active learning strategies such as repetition and shadowing, can improve students' pronunciation accuracy and self-confidence (Amanda et al., 2023). However, the efficacy of the instructional videos is contingent upon several factors including linguistic differences, exposure to authentic pronunciation, and adequate technological resources.

In order to overcome the problems, students found to be relying on teacher assistance. Thus, teachers' experience using ICT tools, training received, and technology appropriation are required to help teachers in facilitating students in the process of integrating ICT for learning English (Canese et al., 2022). This is in line with the theory of scaffolding which is defined as a collaborative environment where teacher and learners share responsibility for learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). To illustrate, teacher assistance through scaffolding supports students during the learning process and is gradually reduced as they develop the skills needed for independent learning. In technology-mediated environments, scaffolding can be provided by tutors or intelligent agents so that learners acquire new skills, concepts and knowledge. A recent study by Wang et al (2025) demonstrated that the utilization of technology for speaking purposes, particularly interactive AI-based scaffolding, resulted in the treatment group exhibiting enhanced benefits in vocabulary, goal setting, self-evaluation, and motivation, in comparison to the control group. Thus, assistance and scaffolding provided by the teachers plays a critical role in facilitating the students' language learning in a technology-based learning environment.

Beyond facilitating language learning through teacher assistance and scaffolding, the findings revealed that ICT was perceived by the participants as more than a technological tool. It represented a new and meaningful learning experience that changed how they viewed English learning. Through their initial interactions with videos, games, and ICT-based activities, students interpreted the experience as enjoyable, engaging, and less intimidating than their previous encounters with English learning. From the perspective of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), these experiences can be understood as concrete learning experiences through which learners actively constructed new meanings and perceptions about language learning. The novelty and interactivity of ICT appeared to stimulate curiosity and participation, enabling students to experience English as an accessible and enjoyable subject rather than a demanding one. This finding is supported by studies indicating that digital games and multimedia resources create interactive and learner-centered environments that positively influence learners' perceptions and engagement in

language learning (Xiao & He, 2023). Furthermore, research has shown that game-based language learning can promote motivation, interaction, and positive learning experiences while enhancing language learning outcomes (Yang & Li, 2024). Consequently, the participants' experiences suggest that ICT transformed their understanding of learning English from a traditionally teacher-centered and potentially stressful activity into a more interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning process. Collectively, the findings suggest that first-time ICT integration was experienced as a transformative learning journey characterized by curiosity, empowerment, uncertainty, and gradual adaptation. ICT was not merely perceived as a technological tool but as a gateway to new ways of engaging with English learning.

D. CONCLUSION

This study explores perspectives and lived experiences of students on initial implementation of ICT in an English-speaking subject within a rural Indonesian context. The findings offer a number of insights that contribute to the field of EFL learning by revealing how students perceived and experienced the introduction of ICT in their learning process. These include positive aspects such as engagement, language proficiency, the overcoming of speaking anxiety, and the increase in students' confidence when speaking. Although students generally reported positive experiences with ICT integration, several challenges emerged during its implementation. This was due to challenges experienced during the implementation phase, which were related to technical issues with the tools. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the students, the role of the teacher was significant in the implementation of ICT in the learning process. Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted with only four participants from a single rural school, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. As a phenomenological study, the findings represent the participants' subjective experiences and should not be generalized to all rural EFL learners. Consequently, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the issue, future research should be conducted from the perspectives of both students and teachers. Including more participants is also suggested to gain more holistic insights. The findings of this study may provide useful insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to promote effective and equitable ICT integration in English language learning.

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