CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of The Study

Over the past two decades, South Korean popular culture, known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu), has evolved from a regional entertainment trend into a highly influential global cultural phenomenon. It has shaped lifestyles, media consumption patterns, and language behaviors across continents, including Indonesia. Among the various forms of Hallyu, Korean Pop (K-Pop) stands out not only as a music genre but also as a transnational cultural force that profoundly shapes the digital habits, social identity, and communication practices of Indonesian youth. According to GoodStats Data (2025) compiled from Chartmetric (2024), Indonesia ranks as among the largest consumers of K-Pop in the world, contributing 18.47% of total global K-Pop streaming, downloads, and digital sales, surpassing other major markets.[1] This dominance reflects not just a sheer enthusiasm for music, but also Indonesia's massive digital demographics, with around 212 million internet users by 2025, making the country both a major target market and one of the most dynamic fandom ecosystem in the world.[2]

Supporting data from various industry reports highlight Indonesia's leading role in global K-Pop consumption. For instance, Indonesia ranks in the global top 10 for on-demand audio (ODA) streaming volume, including significant K-Pop engagement, as noted in Luminate's analysis of international markets.[3] This enthusiasm extends to social media, where Indonesia has consistently ranked first worldwide for K-Pop-related discussions on X (formerly Twitter) from 2020 to 2022 (and beyond in earlier years), contributing to over 7.5 billion global tweets in the July 2020 until June 2021

[1] GoodStats Data, "Indonesia Jadi Konsumen Terbesar K-Pop di Dunia, Sentuh 18% Pangsa Pasar Global," 19 Juni 2025, https://data.goodstats.id/statistic/injdonesia-jadi-konsumen-terbesar-k-pop-di-dunia-sentuh-18-pangsa-pasar-global-rneOI (berdasarkan data Chartmetric 2024).

[2] DataReportal, "Digital 2025: Indonesia," 25 Februari 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia.

[3] Luminate, "2024 Year-End Music Report," January 2025, https://luminatedata.com/reports/yearend-music-industry-report-2024/ (Indonesia in global top 10 ODA streaming; K-Pop highlighted in APAC exports, e.g., https://luminatedata.com/blog/introducing-the-luminate-export-power-score/).

period alone.[4] On YouTube, Indonesia features prominently in high rankings for music and entertainment viewing, aligning with K-Pop trends in the platform's Culture & Trends Reports.[5] Surveys indicate strong popularity among Indonesian youth, with K-Pop rated highly (e.g., "very familiar" by substantial portions of respondents), reflecting deep integration into youth culture.[6] Additionally, the We Are Social Digital 2025 Report notes that Indonesians spend an average of around 45 hours per month on TikTok, much of which involves short-form content like K-Pop videos, with 87.5% of adults consuming short-form videos weekly.[7] Collectively, these figures demonstrate that K-Pop fandom in Indonesia transcends mere entertainment, forming a robust socio-digital ecosystem that influences interaction, creativity, and identity formation among fans.

More importantly, this phenomenon has significant linguistic implications for young Indonesians involved in K-Pop fandom. In the global K-Pop ecosystem, English serves as the primary lingua franca, enabling fans from diverse linguistic backgrounds to connect and communicate effectively.[8] On platforms like X, TikTok, and instagram Indonesian fans not only consume content but also actively participate in various forms of multilingual interaction, such as writing captions, posting comments, creating threads, roleplaying (RP), engaging in discussions, and creating content in English to

[4] Twitter/X Year-End Data (2021), "Twitter Sees 7.5B K-Pop Tweets From July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021," https://www.adweek.com/social-marketing/twitter-sees-7-5b-k-pop-tweets-from-july-1-2020-to-june-30-2021/ (Indonesia #1 country); continued top rankings confirmed in 2022 reports, e.g., https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/music/most-mentioned-k-pop-artists-twitter-2020-2021/.

[5] YouTube Culture & Trends Report 2024, https://www.youtube.com/trends/report/ Indonesia top market for music/entertainment trends, including K-Pop-related viewing).

[6] Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (via Statista, 2024), "Popularity of South Korean pop music (K-pop) in Indonesia as of November 2023," https://www.statista.com/statistics/956017/south-korea-kpop-popularity-in-indonesia/ (high familiarity/popularity ratings among youth).

[7] We Are Social and Meltwater. "Digital 2025: Indonesia." DataReportal, February 2025. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia.

[8] Yang Song and Yuhan Feng, "Doing Participatory Fandom Through Trans-Scripting The Case of Multilingual K-Pop Fans on Chinese Social Media," *Chinese Language and Discourse. An International and Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1075/cld.21003.son.

interact with fellow fans and international idols.[9] These activities reflect communicative practices, namely, repetitive communication patterns that become social habits that contribute to the formation of relationships, identities, and social realities within digital communities. This intense exposure to authentic English usage then fosters the formation of informal language practices based on personal interest in K-Pop content.

K-Pop fans' involvement in digital spaces aligns with the concept of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) proposed by Lee and Dressman (2017)[10] and Lee (2019), namely English learning that takes place autonomously, based on interests, and mediated by technology outside the context of formal education.[11] This concept developed from previous studies of digital learning outside the classroom (Sockett, 2014;[12] Benson, 2017)[13] which emphasized that online activities can be a means of authentic and meaningful language acquisition. In the IDLE environment, learners have the opportunity to develop receptive and productive skills through digital activities that are driven by intrinsic motivation and provide meaningful linguistic input and output.[14] In the context of K-Pop fandom, these practices are seen through activities such as listening to songs, watching videos, reading comments or posts, and participating in communicative interaction using English. These activities not only enrich exposure to authentic English usage but also encourage fans to actively produce language through comments, discussions, threads, and digital content creation. Therefore, K-Pop fandom

[9] Fathimah Azzahrah et al., "Multilingualism in Social Media: Indonesian K-Pop Fans Language Choices on Twitter," *Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching.* 6, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.33479/klausa.v6i01.457.
[10] Ju Song Lee and Mark Dressman, "When IDLE Hands Make an English Workshop: Informal Digital Learning of English and Language Proficiency," *TESOL Quarterly* 0, no. 0 (2017): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.422.
[11] Ju Seong Lee, "An Emerging Path to English in Korea: Informal Digital Learning of English," *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning*, 2019, 289–301, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119472384.ch19.
[12] G. Sockett and Brian Poole, *The Online Informal Learning of English*, ed. Hayo Reinders, *ELT Journal*, vol. 70, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv062.
[13] Phil Benson, "Language Learning Beyond the Classroom: Access All Areas," *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* 8 (2017): 135–46, https://doi.org/10.37237/080206.
[14] Ju Song Lee and Mark Dressman, "When IDLE Hands Make an English Workshop: Informal Digital Learning of English and Language Proficiency."

can be understood as an interest-driven space that provides a naturalistic digital environment in which Indonesian EFL learners may encounter and engage with English in meaningful and socially situated ways (Liu et al., 2025)[15]

In the Indonesian context, K-Pop fandom encompasses diverse fan communities centered around specific groups or artists, such as BTS (ARMY), BLACKPINK (BLINK), EXO (EXO-L), and TXT (MOA). Each fandom operates within its own digital ecosystem, typically organized through social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and Weverse. Despite variations across fandoms, these communities share several common participatory practices, including streaming campaigns, voting for music awards, creating and sharing fan-generated content, and engaging in real-time discussions during live broadcasts or content releases (Faiza, 2020;[16] Amalia, 2023).[17] These shared practices are relevant to this study because they represent recurring contexts in which Indonesian fans encounter and use English as part of their everyday fandom participation.

Despite variations across fandoms, these activities exhibit notable similarities in their reliance on digital communication and transnational interaction. English frequently functions as a common medium for communication, particularly when fans interact with global audiences, access untranslated content, or participate in international fandom initiatives. For instance, Indonesian fans often use English when posting captions, translating content, or engaging in discussions to ensure wider reach and mutual understanding across linguistic boundaries. These repeated practices create opportunities for both receptive and productive language use, positioning fandom participation as a socially embedded context for informal English

[15] Guangxiang Leon Liu et al., "Informal Digital Learning of English in Asian English as a Foreign Language Contexts : A Thematic Review," 2025, https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882251332309.
[16] Dinar Faiza, "Stimulating English Learning in Global K-Pop Community on Twitter," *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (2020): 75–91.
[17] Elvira Putri Amalia, "The Impact of Foreign K-Pop Idols on Indonesian Fans' English Learning Motivation in Terms of English as a Foreign Language" (Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo, 2023).

exposure that operates alongside, rather than in replacement of, formal language instruction.

Building on these participatory practices, K-Pop fandom in Indonesia can be understood as a digital environment that supports informal English language exposure among young learners. Fans regularly encounter English through various multimodal channels, including subtitles on music videos, translated lyrics, official idol updates, and global discussions on social media platforms (Faiza, 2020;[18] Amalia, 2023;[19] Anisa et al., 2022).[20] This exposure may extend to more active and productive practices, such as creating fan subtitles, writing fanfiction, and participating in collaborative translation projects, which require practical use of English vocabulary. These activities reflect broader patterns of informal digital English learning described by Lee & Dressman (2017);[21] and have been further contextualized in local fan-based studies Fatika & Wahyuningsih (2024).[22] Research has shown that informal digital engagements are associated with the development of specific aspects of English language learning, such as vocabulary use, pragmatic awareness, and learner confidence in EFL contexts (Lee & Dressman, 2017;[23] Lee & Drajati, 2019).[24] Moreover, previous studies on informal digital learning suggest that interest-driven digital engagement is associated with increased motivation to learn English and sustained self-directed language practices (Lee, 2019).[25] In the Indonesian context, research on K-Pop fandom further reports that participation in K-Pop-related online communities supports speaking

[18] Faiza, "Stimulating English Learning in Global K-Pop Community on Twitter."
[19] Amalia, "The Impact of Foreign K-Pop Idols on Indonesian Fans' English Learning Motivation in Terms of English as a Foreign Language."
[20] Cindy Sekar Ajeng Anisa, Yahya Alaydrus, and Ika Hidayanti, "The Influence of K-Pop Idols on the Student's English Learning Motivation: Does Gender Matter?," *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, Dan Pembelajaran (JP3)* 19, no. 19 (2024).
[21] Ju Song Lee and Mark Dressman, "When IDLE Hands Make an English Workshop: Informal Digital Learning of English and Language Proficiency."
[22] Mulia Fatika and Sri Wahyuningsih, "Fostering English Skills through Kpop : Evidence from Students in Indonesia," 2024, 425–39.
[23] Ju Song Lee and Mark Dressman, "When IDLE Hands Make an English Workshop: Informal Digital Learning of English and Language Proficiency."
[24] Ju Seong Lee and Nur Arifah Drajati, "English as an International Language beyond the ELT Classroom," *ELT Journal* 73, no. 4 (2019): 419–27, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccz018.
[25] Lee and Drajati.

confidence and engagement with authentic multimodal English resources (Fatika & Wahyuningsih, 2024).[26] Thus, the fandom ecosystem can be viewed as a naturalistic and highly motivating context for Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), where entertainment-oriented digital engagement provides opportunities for meaningful English use outside traditional educational settings.

Empirical findings from the Indonesian context reinforce these claims regarding the benefits of informal digital engagements in EFL learning. For instance, Suci (2023) reported that students who regularly consume K-Pop content with English subtitles and engage in English-language discussions show marked vocabulary growth.[27] Rahayu and Fajaria (2024) found that reading English fanfiction improves literacy and interpretive skills,[28] while Sabillah et al (2025) identified increased language confidence through role-play interactions in online fandoms.[29] Purtanto (2025) further demonstrated that repeated exposure to English subtitles enhances listening comprehension among Indonesian EFL learners.[30] Collectively, these studies affirm that K-Pop fandom functions as a meaningful and emotionally engaging learning environment that cultivates English proficiency through authentic digital participation.

Beyond linguistic outcomes, emotional engagement forms a critical dimension of this learning process among Indonesian K-Pop fans. The concept of Parasocial Interaction (PSI), first articulated by Horton and Wohl (1956), describes the illusion of a one-sided yet emotionally rich relationship that

[26] Fatika and Wahyuningsih, "Fostering English Skills through Kpop : Evidence from Students in Indonesia."
[27] Suci Isnia Wulan, "Students' Interest in k -Pop and Its Perceived Contribution to Their Vocabulary Mastery," no. July (2023).
[28] Fitri Rahayu, Nurul Hasanah Fajaria, and Hana Amanda, "Describing the Motivation and Literacy Activities of Indonesian K-Pop Fans in Online English Fanfiction" 2, no. 2 (2024).
[29] I Sabillah, Irmayani, and D Sofeny, "English Language Exposure Among Indonesian K-Pop Fans in Social Media Role-Play Communities," *JPBII* 13, no. 2 (2025), https://doi.org/10.23887/jpbi.v13i2.5894.
[30] Chika Azizah Purtanto, "The Relationship Between English Subtitle Usage Among Korean Fans Community and Preference in Learning English" (Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, 2025).

media audiences develop with public figures.[31] In the context of digital K-Pop fandom, PSI manifests through fans' perceived emotional connections with idols, which strongly motivate them to better understand the idols' language, including English elements in songs, interviews, and social media posts Amalia, Elvira Putri (2023).[32] Studies have shown that such parasocial bonds can enhance learners' overall motivation, sustained attention, and active participation in language-related activities Beautemps, Jacob, and André Bresges (2022).[33] In Indonesian fandoms, this emotional attachment frequently translates into greater confidence and purpose when communicating in English, particularly within international fan communities on platforms like X (Twitter) Febrianti, et al (2022).[34] Consequently, PSI contributes to an increased Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English, providing fans with intrinsic drive to engage globally despite being EFL learners.[35]

Although K-Pop fandom activities provide rich opportunities for English language use, how learners experience and perceive this involvement personally remains underexplored. So far, various studies on the relationship between K-Pop fandom and English language learning in Indonesian EFL learners have generally focused on measurable outcomes, such as vocabulary improvement, grammatical awareness, learning motivation, and confidence in using English. While these findings are important in demonstrating an empirical relationship between fandom involvement and language development, the predominantly quantitative approach often fails to capture the deeper dimensions of the learning experience, such as the affective, social,

[31] Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction," *Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049.
[32] Amalia, "The Impact of Foreign K-Pop Idols on Indonesian Fans' English Learning Motivation in Terms of English as a Foreign Language."
[33] Jacob Beautemps and André Bresges, "The Influence of the Parasocial Relationship on the Learning Motivation and Learning Growth with Educational YouTube Videos in Self Regulated Learning," no. December (2022): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1021798.
[34] Azzahrah et al., "Multilingualism in Social Media: Indonesian K-Pop Fans Language Choices on Twitter."
[35] Amalia, "The Impact of Foreign K-Pop Idols on Indonesian Fans' English Learning Motivation in Terms of English as a Foreign Language."

and cognitive aspects experienced by learners in their daily lives. Furthermore, there is still little research specifically exploring the kind of language input obtained through communicative interactions in digital fandom spaces, even though these interactions are at the core of communication practices in Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) environments. In the Indonesian context, understanding how young fans perceive their experiences while participating in transnational fandom communities is also very limited. Furthermore, there is limited research examining how sustained engagement in fandoms can shape linguistic identity, enhance metacognitive awareness of English, or influence how they view English as a means of social connection and self-expression. This gap suggests the need for a more in-depth approach to understanding the emotional and sociocultural dynamics that underpin the long-term process of informal digital English learning. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the experiences of Indonesian EFL learners in acquiring English through participation in K-Pop fandom. Using a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to explore how learners experience their English acquisition process in affective, social, and linguistic aspects, as well as how fandom participation shapes their motivation, confidence, and communicative engagement. Thus, K-Pop fandom is seen as a participatory and authentic digital space that can provide new insights into contemporary English acquisition experiences among Indonesian EFL learners.

B. Research Focus and Questions

1. Research Focus

This study focuses on Indonesian EFL learners' engagement in K-Pop fandom as a site of informal digital English learning. Specifically, it investigates the English language inputs obtained through active communicative interactions within K-Pop fandom communities on social media, as well as the learners' personal perceptions and meanings attributed to these experiences.

2. Research Questions

1. What kind of English language input is found in K-Pop fandom social media communication?
2. How do Indonesian EFL learners perceive their experiences of English language learning through K-Pop fandom practices?

C. Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore Indonesian EFL learners' experiences in learning English through K-Pop fandom activities, particularly focusing on the language inputs found or identified from communicative interactions and the meanings they attribute to these experiences.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify and describe the English language inputs found or used by Indonesian K-Pop fans through communicative interactions on K-Pop fandom social media platforms.
2. To explore how Indonesian EFL learners perceive and make sense of their English language acquisition experiences through participation in K-Pop fandom practices.

D. Research Benefits

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the field of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) by providing empirical insights into how K-Pop fandom serves as a rich context for English language acquisition. Specifically, the findings will expand current understanding of the kind of authentic language inputs generated through real communicative interactions in transnational fandom communities.

Furthermore, by adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach, this research will deepen the theoretical knowledge on how Indonesian EFL learners perceive and construct meaning from their informal English acquisition experiences in digital spaces. The study also

aims to enrich the literature on the intersection between popular culture, participatory fandom practices, and second language acquisition in EFL contexts.

2. Practical Benefits

The practical contributions of this study are as follows:

a. For English teachers and lecturers, this research offers insights into how students' personal interests in K-Pop can be utilized as a bridge to enhance authentic language input and communicative practice outside the classroom.
b. For Indonesian EFL learners, the findings can increase awareness that active participation in K-Pop fandom is a legitimate and powerful pathway for informal English learning.
c. For curriculum developers and material designers, this study provides a reference for developing interest-based and digital-mediated English learning materials.
d. For future researchers, this study offers a methodological example of combining analysis of actual language input with phenomenological exploration of learners' lived experiences in one research framework.

E. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study examines the English language acquisition experiences of Indonesian EFL learners through their active participation in K-Pop fandom communities in digital spaces. Specifically, it explores two dimensions namely kind of English language input available through communicative interactions in fandom social media, and how learners perceive and make meaning of those experiences.

The scope of this study includes Indonesian EFL learners who actively engage in K-Pop fandom activities on digital platforms, the kind of English language input encountered through communicative interactions such as comments, replies, discussion threads, and live chats on social media, and learners' subjective perceptions and meaning-making processes in relation to

their English acquisition experiences within K-Pop fandom practices.

In addressing the first research question, kind of language input identified in communicative interactions is analyzed through two dimensions: linguistic forms, which include words, phrases, clauses, and expressions; and semantic or thematic categories, which classify input based on communicative topics or meanings, such as emotions, fan support, fandom activities, digital culture, and interpersonal interaction.

This study is limited to online communicative activities occurring on social media platforms commonly used by Indonesian K-Pop fans, namely X (Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, Weverse, and WhatsApp. The study adopts a qualitative design, employing documentation and artefact analysis for the first research question and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for the second research question. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all Indonesian EFL learners or all K-Pop fandom communities. Furthermore, this study does not quantitatively measure English proficiency gains, does not examine formal classroom-based English instruction, and does not include role-play activities, as none of the sixteen participants in this study reported engaging in role-play as part of their fandom practices.

F. Definition of Key Term

To avoid misunderstanding and ensure clarity in interpreting the title, research questions, and analysis of this study, the following key terms are defined as they are used in this research.

1. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Learners

EFL learners refer to individuals who are learning English in contexts where English is not used as the primary language in daily communication. In this study, these Indonesian EFL learners are those who interact with English through informal digital activities within the K-Pop fan community.

2. Language Input

In this study, language input refers to the English language

exposure K-Pop fans may receive through communicative interactions within K-Pop fandom activities on digital social media platforms. Drawing on Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, this study considers language input as English linguistic elements that learners are exposed to and can generally comprehend, encompassing both passive input, received without direct involvement, and input arising from active communicative interaction. This includes linguistic forms such as words, phrases, clauses, and expressions, as well as semantic or thematic categories including emotions, fan support, fandom activities, and digital culture.

3. **Communicative Interaction**

Communicative interaction refers to the process of exchanging meaning through language in digital social contexts. In this study, it specifically refers to fan-to-fan interactions occurring through comments, replies, discussion threads, and live chats on social media platforms such as X, Instagram, TikTok, Weverse, and WhatsApp.

4. **K-Pop Fandom Activity**

K-Pop fandom activity refers to the communicative and participatory practices carried out by K-Pop fans in digital communities, including commenting, replying, discussing, and engaging in live broadcast conversations on social media platforms. In this study, these activities are understood as informal, interest-driven digital practices through which learners naturally encounter and use English outside formal classroom settings.

5. **Idol**

Idol refers to a Korean entertainment performer who undergoes professional training in singing, dancing, and public performance before debuting as a member of a K-pop group or as a solo artist. Idols are central

figures in K-pop fandoms and often maintain close interactions with fans through various media platforms.

6. Bias

Bias is a term commonly used in K-pop fandom culture to refer to a fan's favorite member within a K-pop group. A bias is typically the member to whom a fan feels the strongest personal preference, admiration, or emotional attachment.

7. Comeback

In the context of K-Pop, a comeback is the return of an idol or group with new work, such as a new song, album, or concept, after a period of promotional inactivity. Interestingly, in K-Pop, a comeback doesn't always mean a previous hiatus or break. The term is used almost every time an idol releases new work and begins a new promotional period.

8. Lived Experience

Lived experience refers to the subjective and personal ways in which individuals perceive, feel specific phenomena in their daily lives. In this study, it refers to how Indonesian EFL learners personally experience and make meaning of their English learning through K-Pop fandom participation.

9. Learners Experience and Perception Related to K-Pop

Learners' experiences and perceptions refer to how Indonesian EFL learners personally perceive, engage with, and make meaning of their English language learning through K-Pop fandom activities. This includes how they experience everyday fandom practices such as reading subtitles and writing comments, and how they perceive the role of English in shaping their confidence, communication, and identity within global fandom communities.

10. Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)

Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) refers to self-directed English learning that occurs outside formal classroom settings through digital media and online activities driven by personal interest.

11. Interpretative Phenomological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach that explores how individuals understand and make sense of their personal lived experiences. In this study, IPA was used to analyze and interpret how Indonesian EFL learners perceive and give meaning to their English acquisition experiences through K-Pop fandom participation.