

ABSTRACT

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This study explores the phenomenon of English language exposure among Indonesian K-pop fans actively engaged in social media-based role-play (RP) communities. With the growing popularity of K-pop culture and the increasing use of English in fan activities, this research investigates how digital fandom spaces function as informal learning environments for language acquisition. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to gain in-depth insight into participants' lived experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 Indonesian K-pop role-players, complemented by observations and documentation analysis. The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify recurring themes and patterns of English usage within RP practices. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory served as the theoretical foundation, emphasizing learning through social interaction and cultural mediation. The findings revealed four overarching motivations for English language use within RP communities: aesthetic and "cool" factor, social conformity and peer influence, character immersion and role demands, and functional communication needs. Participants used English in various contexts such as profile bios, captions, promotional lists, and event-based activities. English was employed both intentionally and incidentally, often driven by exposure to peers, the desire to project a global image, or the demands of the characters they portrayed. Although RP users were not always proficient in English, their engagement fostered incidental learning, increased confidence, and vocabulary development. The role-play environment also provided a supportive, low-pressure space for experimenting with the language. The study concludes that social media RP communities, particularly in K-pop fandoms, offer a unique and underexplored avenue for informal English exposure. These communities create authentic, interest-driven opportunities for language learning outside formal classroom settings. The results have implications for educators and policymakers seeking to integrate popular culture into language learning strategies. Furthermore, the study highlights the educational value of digital fandom practices and their potential to support English language development in engaging and meaningful ways.