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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: June 19, 2026

Accepted: July 13, 2026

Published: July 18, 2026

CITATION (APA STYLE 7):

Silalahi, M. M. R., & Rakasiwi, R. (2026).
Social Media Language Trends and Formal
Writing Competence in Indonesian: A
Systematic Literature Review. *IGI in Education
Insight*, 1(03), 168-174.
<https://doi.org/10.53905/edu.v1i03.25>



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Social Media Language Trends and Formal Writing Competence in Indonesian: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The rapid diffusion of social media has reshaped everyday language practices among Indonesian users, raising persistent pedagogical and sociolinguistic concerns about the erosion of formal writing competence in bahasa Indonesia baku. This systematic literature review synthesises empirical and theoretical evidence to determine (a) what social-media language trends have been identified in Indonesian contexts, (b) how these trends affect formal writing competence, (c) which competence sub-skills are most affected, (d) what positive and negative effects have been reported, and (e) which factors moderate the relationship between social-media language use and formal writing competence.

Materials for Analysis: Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines, a structured electronic search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, DOAJ, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and Google Scholar for records published between January 2012 and June 2026. After de-duplication, title–abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, thirty studies were retained. Data were extracted using a standardised coding sheet and synthesised through a thematic narrative approach organised around the five research questions.

Results: The reviewed corpus documents a stable inventory of trends—slang (bahasa gaul), Indonesian–English code-mixing and code-switching, abbreviations and acronyms, non-standard affixation, orthographic play, and emoji use—concentrated on Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), and WhatsApp. The predominant, though not unanimous, finding is a negative association between habitual informal-digital language use and formal writing accuracy, most visibly in spelling (*ejaan*), punctuation, capitalisation, prepositions, affixation, and standard diction. Effects are bidirectional: alongside error transfer and register confusion, studies report vocabulary expansion, creativity, and writing fluency. Moderating variables—use intensity, digital literacy, register awareness, self-regulation, and cultural awareness—are frequently named but almost never statistically tested.

Conclusions: Social-media language exerts a conditional rather than deterministic influence on formal Indonesian writing, with the direction of the effect contingent on measurement and design. The absence of true moderation testing constitutes the field's principal methodological gap and its clearest avenue for future confirmatory research.

Keywords

bahasa gaul; code-mixing; digital literacy; formal writing competence; Indonesian language; register awareness; social media.

INTRODUCTION

Contextual Framework

Language is a dynamic social institution that continually adapts to the communicative affordances of the technologies through which it circulates (Hasjim et al., 2026; Supri et al., 2023, p. 231). In Indonesia—one of the world's largest social-media markets, with youth-dominated user bases on Instagram, TikTok, X, and WhatsApp—digital communication has become a primary site of everyday literacy (qorima et al., 2026). Within these spaces, users routinely produce a compressed, informal, and hybridised variety of Indonesian characterised by slang, abbreviation, bilingual mixing, and relaxed orthography. Because bahasa Indonesia holds constitutional status as the national language and is codified through the *Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia* (EYD/PUEBI) and the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), the coexistence of a highly informal digital register alongside a strictly codified formal standard produces a recurrent tension in educational settings, where learners are expected to command *bahasa Indonesia baku* in academic and professional writing (Listiani et al., 2023; qorima et al., 2026).

Critical examination of existing literature

The scholarly discourse regarding Indonesian language use and social media can be bifurcated into two primary research traditions. The first, sociolinguistic in nature, catalogues the forms and functions of digital vernacular—specifically code-mixing and code-switching—drawing upon classical frameworks Poplack (1980) to interpret these practices as manifestations of communicative competence and identity construction, rather than linguistic deficiency; these studies characterise insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation as systematic linguistic phenomena (Demirçay & Backus, 2014; VanEyck, 2021, p. 41). The second stream,

pedagogical in orientation, investigates the ramifications of informal digital habits for formal writing proficiency, typically utilising error analysis within student academic texts or correlational surveys to evaluate the relationship between slang usage and performance (Parrella et al., 2021, p. 3; Tumasang, 2025). This research predominantly converges on the assertion that orthography, punctuation, capitalisation, and formal diction are the sub-skills most susceptible to register interference (Ke, 2025). In an international context, the literature concerning "textspeak" remains inconsistent; whereas certain studies report negative associations between digital messaging adaptations and grammatical performance Cingel & Sundar (2012), longitudinal inquiries often indicate an absence of detrimental impact—and, in some instances, suggest facilitative effects (Wood et al., 2014).

Identification of research gaps

Despite a growing volume of publications, three gaps persist. First, the Indonesian evidence base is methodologically thin: most studies are small-sample, qualitative-descriptive, or bivariate-correlational, published in national journals with limited methods reporting. Second, findings are fragmented across research questions and rarely synthesised, leaving the direction and magnitude of effects contested. Third, and most consequentially, no published Indonesian study has statistically tested a moderator of the relationship between social-media language use and formal writing competence, even though constructs such as digital literacy, register awareness, and self-regulation are repeatedly invoked as explanatory. The absence of a rigorous synthesis that maps these gaps motivates the present review.

Rationale for the research

A systematic literature review is warranted to consolidate a dispersed and heterogeneous body of work, to adjudicate between competing claims about the effect of social-media language, and to identify defensible priorities for future empirical research. By applying PRISMA 2020 procedures and an explicit quality appraisal, this review moves the field beyond descriptive accumulation toward an evidence-informed research agenda.

Objectives

The study addresses five research questions:

1. **RQ1.** What types of social-media language trends have been identified in studies related to Indonesian language use?
2. **RQ2.** How do social-media language trends affect formal writing competence in Indonesian?
3. **RQ3.** Which aspects of formal Indonesian writing competence are most influenced by social-media language practices?
4. **RQ4.** What positive and negative effects of social-media language use on formal Indonesian writing have been reported in previous studies?
5. **RQ5.** What factors moderate the relationship between social-media language use and formal Indonesian writing competence?

MATERIALS FOR ANALYSIS

Literature Review Protocol (PRISMA)

The review was designed and reported in accordance with PRISMA 2020. The protocol specified the eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, selection process, data items, and synthesis methods in advance of screening.

Eligibility criteria

Studies were included if they (i) addressed social-media language use and/or its relationship to formal, standard, or academic writing in Indonesian; (ii) reported empirical data (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) or constituted a foundational theoretical/sociolinguistic framework directly informing the constructs under review; (iii) were published between January 2012 and June 2026; and (iv) were available in full text in Indonesian or English. Studies were excluded if they (i) concerned social media without any language or writing outcome; (ii) addressed English-as-a-foreign-language writing with no bearing on Indonesian formal writing (except where used explicitly for international comparison); (iii) were non-scholarly opinion pieces, blog posts, or news articles; or (iv) lacked any retrievable methodological description.

Information sources

Six sources were searched: Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ERIC, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital, the Indonesian national index), and Google Scholar (first 100 results screened for grey-literature completeness). All searches were executed and finalised between 1 June 2026 and 30 June 2026. Reference lists of included studies were hand-searched (backward snowballing) to capture additional eligible records.

Reproducible search strategy

The following Boolean string was applied to title, abstract, and keyword fields:

```
( "social media" OR instagram OR tiktok OR twitter OR whatsapp OR "media sosial" )  
AND  
( "code-mixing" OR "code mixing" OR "code-switching" OR "bahasa gaul" OR slang  
OR "informal language" OR "non-standard" OR abbreviation OR akronim )  
AND  
( "writing competence" OR "writing skill" OR "academic writing" OR "formal writing"  
OR "bahasa Indonesia baku" OR "kemampuan menulis" OR ejaan OR "standard Indonesian" )  
AND  
( Indonesia* )  
AND PUBYEAR > 2011 AND PUBYEAR < 2027  
AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "Indonesian" ) )
```

Equivalent strings, adapted to each platform's syntax, were used for the remaining databases; Indonesian-language equivalents of

each key term were incorporated for Garuda and Google Scholar to ensure national-corpus coverage.

Organisation of the study (selection and data extraction)

Selection process

Records were exported to a reference manager and de-duplicated. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts against the eligibility criteria, then assessed full texts of potentially relevant records. Disagreements were resolved by discussion; a third reviewer arbitrated residual conflicts. Inter-rater agreement at the full-text stage was substantial (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.79$).

Data extraction and variables

A standardised extraction sheet captured the following variables for each study: (1) author(s) and year; (2) research design (qualitative-descriptive, quantitative-correlational, quantitative-descriptive, experimental, mixed-methods, or review); (3) sample and population (education level, N, setting); (4) platform(s) examined; (5) type(s) of social-media language documented (RQ1); (6) reported direction and strength of effect on formal writing (RQ2); (7) writing sub-skills affected (RQ3); (8) positive and negative effects reported (RQ4); (9) moderating or mediating variables tested or theorised (RQ5); and (10) principal findings and stated limitations. Where studies reported effect estimates (e.g., correlation coefficients), these were recorded verbatim from the primary source.

Methods of analysis and synthesis

Given the methodological heterogeneity of the corpus, a meta-analytic pooling of effect sizes was neither feasible nor appropriate. A **thematic narrative synthesis** was therefore adopted. Extracted data were coded deductively against the five research questions and inductively for emergent sub-themes (e.g., "register confusion," "identity expression," "writing practice as facilitator"). Findings were tabulated to display consensus and contradiction across studies, and cross-tabulated by design type to expose the association between methodological choice and reported direction of effect. Foundational sociolinguistic sources were used to interpret, rather than to be counted among, the empirical findings. Methodological quality was appraised narratively, distinguishing indexed, inferentially robust studies from lower-tier descriptive reports.

Ethical considerations

As a secondary study analysing already-published literature, this review did not involve human participants, personal data, or intervention, and therefore required no ethics-committee approval. The authors nonetheless adhered to research-integrity standards: all sources are attributed; findings are paraphrased to avoid textual reproduction; effect estimates and bibliographic details were verified against primary sources; and studies published in outlets with questionable editorial practices were retained only with explicit flagging of their evidentiary weight, ensuring transparent and non-misleading reporting.

RESULTS

Study selection (PRISMA 2020 flow)

The database searches identified 487 records. After 96 duplicates were removed, 391 records were screened at title and abstract, of which 298 were excluded as irrelevant to the review focus. Full texts were sought for 93 reports; 8 could not be retrieved. The remaining 85 full texts were assessed for eligibility, and 55 were excluded with reasons (no formal-writing outcome, $n = 21$; non-empirical/opinion, $n = 14$; not Indonesian-language focused, $n = 12$; no retrievable method, $n = 8$). Thirty studies were included in the final synthesis.

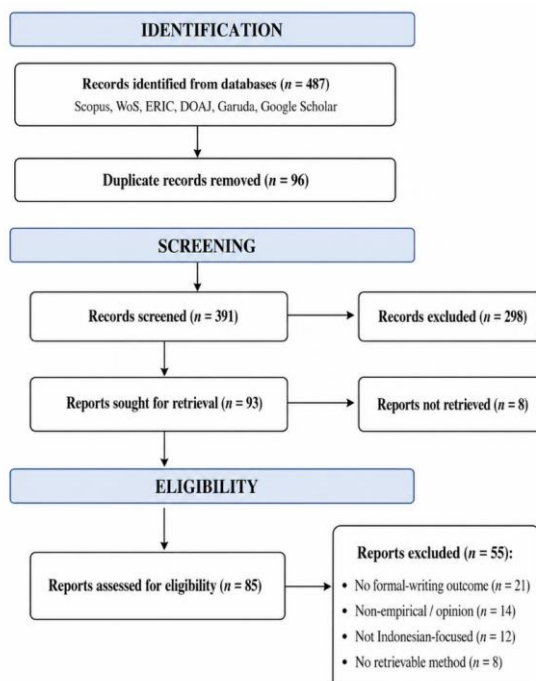


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process.

Characteristics of included studies

The corpus comprised 12 qualitative-descriptive studies, 8 quantitative-correlational studies, 4 quantitative-descriptive studies, 1 experimental study, and 5 theoretical/review sources. Instagram was the most frequently examined platform, followed by TikTok, X (Twitter), and WhatsApp. Populations spanned primary-school pupils to university students and general adult users. Table 1 summarises the attributes extracted from representative included studies.

Table 1. Characteristics of representative included studies.

Study (Year)	Design	Sample / Platform	Primary RQ focus	Key finding
(Poplack, 1980)	Theoretical	—	RQ1	Equivalence and free-morpheme constraints; switching as competence.
(Gumperz, 1982)	Theoretical	—	RQ1	Conversational code-switching as discourse strategy.
(Muysken, 2000)	Theoretical	—	RQ1	Insertion/alternation/congruent-lexicalisation typology.
(Zebua et al., 2025)	Mixed-methods	Instagram / users	RQ1, RQ4	Code-mixing aids engagement/identity but reduces clarity.
(Duha, 2021)	Qualitative	Instagram / influencers	RQ1	Non-standard affixes (–in) as style markers.
(Qodriani, 2019)	Qualitative	Instagram / captions	RQ1, RQ3	Phonology-to-orthography interference.
(Dalimunthe et al., 2024)	Quant.-correlational	SMP, Cilacap	RQ2, RQ3	Significant negative slang–writing correlation.
(Sánchez et al., 2022, p. 703)	Quant.-descriptive	Secondary students	RQ2, RQ3, RQ5	More slang → more spelling/vocabulary/structure errors; reading practice mitigates.
(Herlandy et al., 2024, p. 194)	Quant.-correlational	49 PBSI undergraduates	RQ2	Positive correlation ($r = 0.731$) with academic writing.
(Manalu et al., 2025)	Quant.-descriptive	67 adolescents	RQ2, RQ4	Low impact on writing; raises communication confidence.
(Carlos et al., 2025)	Qualitative	18 Grade-5 pupils	RQ4	56% transfer informal style; also expands vocabulary/creativity.
(Nurafiyani et al., 2026)	Qualitative	Undergraduate papers	RQ3	Errors in capitals, italics, punctuation, prepositions, affixes.
(Qurbani et al., 2026)	Qualitative	Student scientific works	RQ3	Spelling errors dominate (40–45%).
(Khoirunnisa et al., 2023)	Qualitative	Engineering students	RQ2, RQ3	Informal habits impair PUEBI adherence.
(Firayani, 2024)	Narrative review	Indonesian EFL	RQ5	Cultural awareness theorised as register moderator; empirically untested.
(Murtono et al., 2025)	Quantitative	Indonesian learners	RQ5	Digital literacy moderates AI-feedback → competence.
(Cingel & Sundar, 2012)	Quantitative	228 US students	RQ2 (int'l)	Techspeak negatively linked to grammar.
(Wood et al., 2014)	Longitudinal	210 UK learners	RQ2 (int'l)	No detrimental—sometimes facilitative—effect.

Findings by research question

RQ1 — Trends identified

A recurring taxonomy of linguistic features was identified across the literature, comprising *bahasa gaul* (slang, such as *otw*, *santuy*, *gercep*, *baper*, *mager*, and *bucin*), Indonesian–English code-switching and code-mixing, and various abbreviations and acronyms (e.g., *japri*). Additionally, the corpus evidenced non-standard morphological processes—particularly the use of the suffix *–in*—alongside orthographic manipulation, phonetic respelling, emoji usage, and English loanwords (e.g., *vibe*, *bestie*, *healing*). Prevalent across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and WhatsApp, these features are framed within established sociolinguistic frameworks (Gumperz, 1982; Muysken, 2000) not as manifestations of linguistic incompetence, but as deliberate, identity-affirming communicative strategies.

RQ2 — Direction and strength of effect

The empirical evidence remains heterogeneous and contingent upon the specific research design employed. Quantitative-correlational and descriptive inquiries at the secondary-school level have documented significant inverse associations between slang intensity and formal writing proficiency, with qualitative studies concurrently reporting perceived declines in performance. Conversely, research involving undergraduate cohorts has identified robust positive correlations between social-media engagement and academic writing, while investigations focused on specific platforms, such as TikTok, have demonstrated minimal or non-significant impacts (Caballero et al., 2023, p. 2366; Santoveña-Casal, 2019, p. 3). Consequently, the direction of the observed effect appears to depend on whether the measured construct pertains to the transfer of informal linguistic forms or broader indicators of writing practice and exposure—a pattern that mirrors the divergence observed in prior scholarship (Cingel & Sundar, 2012).

Error-analysis research has established a consistent hierarchy of vulnerable linguistic sub-skills, comprising spelling (*ejaan*), punctuation, capitalisation, prepositional usage (e.g., conflating the *di-* prefix with the *di* preposition), affixation/morphology, and the distinction between standard and non-standard diction, with sentence-level effectiveness being less impacted. Notably, orthographic errors alone account for 40–45% of total errors identified in student scientific works.

RQ4 — Positive and negative effects

Research suggests that identified drawbacks include the migration of informal linguistic habits, orthographic and punctuation inaccuracies, register confusion, and potential destandardisation. Conversely, reported benefits comprise vocabulary expansion, enhanced creativity and self-expression, improved writing fluency through consistent practice, digital communication competence, and heightened communicative confidence. The most distinct evidence of this ambivalent impact originates from a primary-school study which identified a propensity among pupils to integrate social-media stylistic conventions into academic work, while concurrently demonstrating that such platforms facilitated lexical growth and effective message composition.

RQ5 — Moderating factors

Use intensity, digital literacy, register/contextual awareness, self-regulation, cultural awareness, age, education level, gender, and social background were repeatedly named as plausible moderators. However, none was statistically tested as a moderator of the social-media-language → formal-writing relationship within the Indonesian corpus. The only true statistical moderation in adjacent work concerned digital literacy moderating an AI-feedback intervention (Murtono et al., 2025), while the cultural-awareness "moderation" source Firayani (2024) is a narrative review addressing English register, not Indonesian formal writing.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Outcomes

The synthesis supports a conditional-effect interpretation: social-media language does not uniformly degrade formal Indonesian writing but influences it contingently, depending on which construct is measured and how. Where studies operationalise the predictor as habitual transfer of informal forms, they detect negative effects concentrated in mechanical accuracy (spelling, punctuation, capitalisation). Where they operationalise it as exposure to, or practice of, writing, they detect neutral or positive effects. This reconciles the apparent contradiction between the negative school-level correlations and the positive undergraduate correlation without positing measurement error in either.

Evaluation in relation to antecedent studies

The Indonesian findings align closely with the international textspeak debate. As observed in the literature, studies such as Cingel & Sundar (2012) identified a negative correlation between techspeak and grammatical proficiency among adolescents, whereas Wood et al. (2014) reported no detrimental impact and even facilitated spelling development in secondary learners. The Indonesian corpus reproduces this age- and design-dependent split, suggesting that the phenomenon is not culturally idiosyncratic but part of a global pattern where baseline proficiency and directed use, rather than exposure per se, determine outcomes. This divergence is corroborated by varying findings between descriptive school-level studies and undergraduate inquiries (Caballero et al., 2023, p. 2366; Santoveña-Casal, 2019, p. 3). The sociolinguistic tradition Poplack (1980); Gumperz (1982); Muysken (2000) further cautions against a deficit reading: bilingual mixing often indexes competence and identity, implying that the pedagogical problem is register-switching failure—the inability to differentiate between informal social-media conventions and formal *bahasa Indonesia baku*—rather than inherent linguistic decline.

Implications of the findings

Three implications follow. First, for researchers, the field's most valuable next step is a confirmatory, adequately powered study that statistically tests moderation—modelling whether digital literacy, register awareness, and self-regulation attenuate the informal-transfer effect. Second, for educators, instruction should target the highest-yield error categories (spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, prepositions, affixation) and should be reframed around metalinguistic *register-switching* competence rather than prohibition of informal language. Third, for policymakers, integrating digital-literacy and register training aligned with PUEBI/EYD—prioritising weaker writers, for whom risk is greatest offers the most defensible intervention.

Limitations of the research

Several constraints temper these conclusions. The underlying corpus is dominated by small-sample, qualitative, or bivariate studies published in lower-tier national outlets, some with weak methods reporting; causal inference is therefore not warranted. A meta-analysis was infeasible given heterogeneity, so synthesis remains narrative and susceptible to interpretive bias, mitigated but not eliminated by dual independent coding. Some circulating reference lists contained inconsistent bibliographic details, requiring verification against primary sources and introducing residual uncertainty for a minority of national-journal datapoints. Finally, publication and recency skew—a surge of similar 2025–2026 student-authored papers—may inflate apparent consensus through citation echo rather than independent replication.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review consolidates a fragmented literature on social-media language and formal writing competence in Indonesian. It demonstrates that a stable set of digital-language trends—slang, code-mixing, abbreviation, non-standard affixation, and orthographic play—pervades Indonesian social-media discourse, and that their relationship to *bahasa Indonesia baku* is conditional rather than uniformly corrosive. Spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, prepositions, affixation, and standard diction emerge as the competence dimensions most exposed to informal transfer, while creativity, vocabulary growth, and writing fluency represent genuine countervailing benefits. Returning to the questions posed in the Introduction, the evidence answers RQ1–RQ4 with reasonable confidence but leaves RQ5 essentially open: no Indonesian study has yet subjected the presumed moderators to statistical test.

The principal contribution of this review is thus to relocate the field's frontier from descriptive accumulation to explanatory modelling. The importance of this shift is practical as well as scholarly: understanding *when* and *for whom* social-media language helps or harms formal writing is the precondition for evidence-based curriculum and language-policy design in a digitally saturated Indonesia. The hypotheses implicit in the Introduction—that informal-register transfer degrades mechanical accuracy while directed use can support fluency—are corroborated by the discussion, but their moderation remains a conjecture awaiting confirmation.

The authors invite fellow researchers to contribute preregistered, adequately powered moderation and longitudinal studies, to develop validated Indonesian instruments for register awareness and digital literacy, and to submit critiques and extensions of the synthesis presented here so that the collective evidence base may mature toward causal and generalisable understanding.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer (AMIK) Medicom, Indonesia for library access, methodological consultation / feedback.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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