

An Investigation of Cyberloafing among EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates cyberloafing among EFL learners in English Department in university at Pekanbaru, focusing on how students use digital devices for non-academic purposes during class. The aims of this study are to assess the level of cyberloafing and identify the reasons why do EFL learners engage in cyberloafing. The subject of this study was selected through cluster random sampling and convenience sampling. The total number of the sample was 71 students for the quantitative study and 10 students for the qualitative study. The study adapted explanatory sequential mixed-method design. The data were collected through 35 items questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The researcher employed descriptive analysis in terms of means for the quantitative data using SPSS 29 and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The results revealed a high level of cyberloafing, with the most common activities being sharing followed by real time updating and accessing online content. It also showed contributing factors to cyberloafing including lecturer-related reasons, such as monotonous teaching methods, course-related reasons like unengaging peer-presentations, and student-related reasons including boredom and short attention spans. The study concluded that reducing cyberloafing may be achieved by improving teaching strategies, incorporating engaging digital tools and managing structured peer-presentations. It is suggested that lecturers establish a clear digital device policy during class, students promote self-regulation learning, and further research may explore long-term consequences of cyberloafing to mitigate cyberloafing behavior in educational settings.

Keywords: Cyberloafing, EFL learners, internet, distraction, technology

INTRODUCTION

The internet has evolved into an essential for communication in daily life. Every year, Indonesian internet users are constantly increasing. According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, Indonesian internet users in 2024 has reached 221,563,479 people from a total population of 278,696,200 Indonesians in 2023. Based on gender, 50.7% of Indonesia's internet exposure contributions are from men and 49.1% are from women. The analysis of exposure rate of internet users by region revealed that, at 69.5%, metropolitan regions continued to contribute the most, followed by rural areas at 30.5%. In addition, the majority of Indonesian internet users, which 34.40% of the total are Gen Z.

The application of technology has also become common among EFL learners to improve their skills. Technology has roles as EFL learning tools and resources such as digital storytelling, podcast, clipped students, and YouTube conversation analysis (Anggeraini, 2018). According to Milon and Iqbal (2017), technology-based language learning is able to assist learners in improving linguistic skills, affecting attitude towards language learning and building self-confidence. But along with this convenience, come new challenges as well such as greater opportunities for students to use the internet for non-academic purposes during class, which distracts them from the learning and lowers their academic performance.

Lim (2002) initially described the term cyberloafing as the practice of employees utilizing the internet for non-business purposes in working hours. Various terms have been used to refer to the term in the existing literature including cyberslacking, cyberdeviance, cyberloafing, and cyberbludging (Alyahya & Alqahtani, 2022). Initially studied in the business sector (Wu et al., 2020), research on cyberloafing expanded to education as technology and the internet became more prevalent (Ozdamli & Ercag, 2021). Cyberloafing in education refers to the practice of educators and students using the internet and other related technologies to attain personal purposes during the official time for teaching and learning (Marcus et al., 2021).

There are plenty of types of cyberloafing behaviours among students. Lim (2002) claimed that it involved browsing and emailing activities. Moreover, Blanchard and Henle (2008) categorize cyberloafing activities into two categories: minor and serious. Minor cyberloafing behaviour includes sending and checking personal email and surfing news or sports sites. On the other hand, serious cyberloafing behaviour includes participating in chat rooms, online gambling, and downloading music illegally. Furthermore, Akbulut et. al (2016), have developed a measure of cyberloafing by dividing the behaviours of cyberloafing into five categories which are sharing, shopping, real-time updating, accessing online content and gaming or gambling.

Moreover, the factors associated with cyberloafing have also been identified. Varol and Yildirim (2019) conducted a study in which they found four factors that influence cyberloafing in an educational setting namely the instructor, course content, student attentiveness, and learning environment. Furthermore, Toker & Baturay (2021) identified several factors triggering cyberloafing in the educational settings. These factors include internet skills, gender, lack of instructor norms, student motivation and positive attitude towards cyberloafing.

Moreover, cyberloafing behaviours can negatively impact learning and contribute to disciplinary problems in the classroom. It can impact students' cognitive resources, reducing focus and engagement in educational activities (Heflin et al., 2017; Nweke et al., 2024). Alyahya and Alqatani (2022) described the effects of

cyberloafing among students may vary in decreased academic performance and achievement (Mei et al., 2021), reduced effectiveness of learning and teaching (Mihelič et al., 2023), and developed smartphone addiction and nomophobia (Gökçearslan et al., 2018). Additionally, it also becomes challenging for the course to accomplish its objectives in such an environment (Şenel et al., 2019).

Multiple studies have been conducted to examine cyberloafing in educational settings. Mei et al. (2021) found that students experienced high levels of cyberloafing with the purposes for social networking. Other studies demonstrated that socialization particularly online chatting was the most common form of cyberloafing among students (Kusumastuti et al., 2024; Toker & Baturay, 2021; Twum et al., 2021). Moreover, gender differences in cyberloafing have also been observed, with male students was found to be more superior than females in cyberloafing (Metin-Orta & Demirtepe-Saygılı, 2023; Tatlı & Sadık, 2021). However, a study conducted by Chrisnatalia et al. (2023) indicated that both male and female students had high level in cyberloafing particularly in sharing and shopping activities.

Mihelič et al. (2023) identified that cyberloafing among students was influenced by subjective norms, cognitive engagement and moral disengagement. Furthermore, Twum et al. (2021) highlighted boredom and distractions as key contributors while Çay et al. (2022) linked cyberloafing behaviour to social media use and frequent internet usage. Furthermore, it was proven that cyberloafing and nomophobia were significantly related (Talan & Kalinkara, 2022). Students engaged in cyberloafing as recovery behaviour from alleviating boredom (Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Additionally, Tatlı and Sadık (2021) found that advanced internet skills and mobile phone usage increased cyberloafing among students. Collectively, these studies showed that boredom, internet skills, and distractions were key drivers of cyberloafing, which negatively affects learning.

The phenomenon of cyberloafing among EFL learners, particularly in the English Department, reflects how students use the internet and technology during lesson time for non-academic purposes. Students often disconnected from the class as they feel bored, sleepy or uninterested with the course material delivered by the lectures. Given the easy access to smartphones, laptops and other digital devices, students found themselves engaging in non-academic activities such as browsing social media, online shopping, watching videos. This distraction negatively affected language acquisition, learning comprehension and active participation in the class.

It is evident that previous studies have started to address cyberloafing in educational settings. However, understanding of how EFL learners perceive and respond to cyberloafing is remains limited. The use of diverse research methods also rarely applied when the previous studies have solely utilized quantitative or qualitative research methods. Additionally, research on cyberloafing in educational settings among EFL learners in Indonesia is still scarce. As the internet and technology integration among EFL learners continues, the prevalence and potential of cyberloafing also rises. In the English Department, these tools are employed to improve the learning quality and students' understanding. Based on the observation by the researcher, cyberloafing has become common issue among EFL learners.

The formulations of the problem in this research are “*What is the level of cyberloafing among EFL learners?*” and “*Why do EFL Learners engage in cyberloafing?*”. Hence, the objectives of the research are to investigate the level of the cyberloafing behavior among the EFL learners and to identify the factors in such

behaviors. The findings are expected to inform the teachers and students with useful insights of the potentials and effects of cyberloafing to design effective classes and minimize cyberloafing behaviors. Therefore, this research can substantially improve teaching and learning quality in educational settings among EFL learners.

METHOD

This research employed explanatory sequential mixed-method design which entails the researcher performing quantitative research first, analyzing the results, and then refining on the result to provide a more thorough explanation using qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population of the research was undergraduate students of English Department, Universitas Riau in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The sample of this research was the fourth semester active students in the academic year 2023/2024 which consisted of 71 students.

The researchers employed questionnaires and interviews as the instruments of the research to obtain the data. The questionnaire was adapted from Blanchard and Henle (2008) and Akbulut et al. (2016) which contained 35 items categorized into five aspects: sharing, shopping, real-time updating, accessing online content and gaming or gambling. The responses were rated on 1-5 points Likert scale. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were employed with 10 students. The questions of the interview were constructed based on theories from Varol and Yildirim (2019), Toker & Baturay (2021) and Kusumastuti et al., (2024).

To analyze the collected data, the researcher employed descriptive analysis including means and percentages using SPSS 29 for the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to analyze qualitative data. Thematic analysis refers to a technique for developing, analyzing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, the following criteria were applied in order to calculate the cyberloafing levels obtained from the quantitative data analysis.

Table 1. The Criteria of Cyberloafing Level Analysis	
Mean	Criteria
$4.21 < X \leq 5.00$	Very High
$3.41 < X \leq 4.20$	High
$2.61 < X \leq 3.40$	Medium
$1.81 < X \leq 2.60$	Low
$1 < X \leq 1.80$	Very Low

(Sugiyono, 2013)

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot test was conducted with 32 students. Using SPSS 29, all items in the questionnaire were found to be valid, as the calculated r-value exceeding the r-table value (0.349). Furthermore, the reliability test yielded score of 0.941, indicating a high level of reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Result of Cyberloafing among EFL Learners

The obtained quantitative data through questionnaire survey revealed the level of cyberloafing among EFL learners. Cyberloafing behaviours consisted of five types including sharing, shopping, real-time updating, accessing online content and gaming or gambling.

Table 2. Students' Responses on Sharing Cyberloafing

No	Items	Average	Level
1	I check my friends' posts when I learn English in the classroom	4.55	Very High
2	I check my friends' social networking profile when I learn English in the classroom	4.11	High
3	I share content on social networks (photo, video, etc.) when I learn English in the classroom	4.01	High
4	I like posts that are interesting when I learn English in the classroom	4.49	Very High
5	I comment on shared posts when I learn English in the classroom	3.99	High
6	I chat with friends online when I learn English in the classroom	4.44	Very High
7	I watch shared videos when I learn English in the classroom	4.30	High
Average		4.27	Very High

Table 2 described students' responses on sharing cyberloafing. Based on this research findings, sharing emerged as the most prevalent form of cyberloafing during class with an average score of 4.27, reflecting a high level of engagement. This indicated that social media were a great source of regular disruption for EFL learners, distracting the focus from academic tasks and creating a less focused learning environment.

Table 3. Students' responses on Shopping Cyberloafing

No	Items	Average	Level
8	I shop online when I learn English in the classroom	3.83	High
9	I visit deal-of-the-day websites when I learn English in the classroom	3.69	High
10	I visit online shopping sites when I learn English in the classroom	3.35	Medium
11	I visit auction sites when I learn English in the classroom	2.39	Low
12	I use online banking/financial services when I learn English in the classroom	3.07	Medium
13	I visit online shops for used products when I learn English in the classroom	2.41	Low
14	I check job advertisements when I learn English in the classroom	3.10	Medium
Average		3.12	Medium

Table 3 illustrated students' responses on shopping cyberloafing. Compared to sharing, shopping was less common but still showed significant engagement with an average score of 3.12, indicating at *medium* level of cyberloafing. This implied that these activities may not be as common as using social media, but they nonetheless showed that

students were distracting their attention from their studies to online shopping, which may interfere with their learning process.

Table 4. Students' Responses on Real-Time Updating Cyberloafing

No	Items	Average	Level
15	I repost a post I like when I learn English in the classroom	3.99	High
16	I save a post I like as favorite when I learn English in the classroom	3.94	High
17	I post content (feeds, tweets) when I learn English in the classroom	3.97	High
18	I post status updates on social networks when I learn English in the classroom	3.90	High
19	I read content (feeds, tweets) when I learn English in the classroom	3.87	High
20	I comment on trending topics when I learn English in the classroom	2.86	Medium
21	I visit general news sites (sports, news, weather forecast) when I learn English in the classroom	4.39	Very High
Average		3.85	High

Table 4 presented students' responses on real-time updating cyberloafing. Real-time updating also demonstrated at *high* level of cyberloafing among EFL learners with an average score of 3.85. These findings suggested that students were regularly involved in real-time updating as an effort to remain informed and connected even at the expense of their classroom engagement.

Table 5. Students' Responses on Accessing Online Content Cyberloafing

No	Items	Average	Level
22	I download music online when I learn English in the classroom	3.41	Medium
23	I listen to music online when I learn English in the classroom	3.94	High
24	I download videos when I learn English in the classroom	2.66	Medium
25	I watch videos online when I learn English in the classroom	4.37	Very High
26	I download applications I need when I learn English in the classroom	3.80	High
27	I use non-course-related applications when I learn English in the classroom	4.10	High
28	I read blogs when I learn English in the classroom	3.34	Medium
Average		3.66	High

Table 5 showed students' responses on accessing online content cyberloafing. With an average score of 3.66, the data indicated that accessing online content at *high* level of cyberloafing. It indicated that students were constantly looking for online content

to distract themselves, which might seriously hinder their capacity to concentrate on academic activities

Table 6. Students' Responses on Gaming or Gambling Cyberloafing

No	Items	Average	Level
29	I visit gambling sites when I learn English in the classroom	1.32	Very Low
30	I bet online when I learn English in the classroom	1.37	Very Low
31	I visit virtual gaming community when I learn English in the classroom	2.34	Low
32	I visit virtual betting community when I learn English in the classroom	1.27	Very Low
33	I play online games when I learn English in the classroom	3.20	Medium
34	I upgrade online games to the latest version when I learn English in the classroom	3.04	Medium
35	I check the latest features in online games when I learn English in the classroom	3.11	Medium
Average		2.24	Low

Table 6 displayed students' responses on gaming or gambling cyberloafing. Gaming or gambling were found to be the least common form of cyberloafing with an average score of 2.24, indicating at *low* level of cyberloafing among EFL learners. These low levels of cyberloafing implied that although gaming and gambling can be highly engaging, they were less accessible or acceptable during class.

Overall Cyberloafing Level

The following table presents a comprehensive analysis of the overall cyberloafing level among students.

Table 7. Overall Students Cyberloafing Level

Cyberloafing Types	Score	Level
Sharing	4.27	Very High
Shopping	3.12	Medium
Real-Time Updating	3.85	High
Accessing Online Content	3.66	High
Gaming or Gambling	2.24	Low
Average	3.43	High

Overall, the result of the study revealed an average score of 3.43 for cyberloafing level, indicating a *high* level of engagement in non-academic activities during class time among EFL learners. The most common forms were sharing (4.27), real-time updating (3.85), and accessing online content (3.66), while less frequent activities included shopping (3.12) and gaming (2.24). The high level of engagement in these cyberloafing activities may regularly shift students focus between academic responsibilities and online distractions, potentially harming their learning outcomes.

Reasons of Cyberloafing among EFL Learners

The qualitative data revealed several key factors contributing to cyberloafing among EFL learners. These factors can be categorized into lecturer-related reasons, course-related reasons and student-related reasons.

Lecturers-Related Reasons for Cyberloafing

This theme focused on the role of lecturers as one of the most important elements in influencing students' engagement and attentiveness in class. Student 3, 6, 7, 9 and 10 stated that,

- S3: *"I find it sometimes boring because of the environment and the lecturers. The lecturers often give too long explanation, I think 70% of them are interesting but other 30% are not."*
- S6: *"...is also because when the lecturers explain, it is not fun, not engaging and just monotone. So, that is also why I feel sleepy.*
- S7: *"Sometimes, the lecturers only explain about the materials without any media or fun game, so I feel bored in the classroom."*
- S8: *"I personally can get sleepy or bored in the class. For example, when the lecturer only speaks or just do one way communication. It makes me feel bored, that is why I use my phone.*
- S10: *"Because just boring. Because the lecturers just give our materials. And then, we just do presentation all of them. So, it just, it's not interesting."*

The excerpts above indicated that students often engaged in cyberloafing due to the lack of engaging and interactive teaching methods employed by lecturers. These issues led to students losing interest and turning to their devices for entertainment and experiencing disconnection with lecturers due to the ineffective teaching methods

Theme 2: Course-Related Reasons for Cyberloafing

This theme covered the procedural aspects of the course content delivery. Several common teaching methods used in delivering lessons consist of lecturing, discussions, presentations and question and answer sessions. Lecturers may use one of these methods or combine them. Student 2, 5 and 9 mentioned that,

- S2: *"When my classmates doing presentation, they sometimes explain it in unattractive way. They just always read it, not really engaging. So yeah, I find it bored."*
- S5: *"Maybe like when there is a presentation, maybe when the presenter is not really engaged with the audience. So that is why I feel like bored and not focus on the presentation."*
- S9: *"It is not the lecturer who makes it feel bored, but it is the presenters. They are not engaging and just like reading, or present the material but just read. Even their intonation is just monotone."*

The result showed issues such as over-reliance on peer-presentations, which are often delivered in an unengaging manner. Students frequently found the course presentations to be dull, as peers tended to simply read the materials without employing the interactive method. In other words, in peer-presentations often failed to capture students' attention, leading to higher potential of cyberloafing.

Students-Related Reasons for Cyberloafing

This theme focused on the students' experiences of boredom and short attention span as the most significant contributors to cyberloafing. For example, Student 1, 4, 6 and 9 described,

- S1: *"Then, it is also because I feel bored or sleepy so I distract myself to not completely fall asleep."*
- S4: *"I often feel bored because of myself, not because of the environment or the course itself."*
- S6: *"Because I am bored and sometimes, I feel sleepy, you know. So yeah, to recharge myself, I decide to scroll my social media for a while but turns out it will be longer than it should be."*
- S9: *"Sometimes it is because I just want to."*

The findings revealed that the cause of students' boredom was not the lecturer, the course or even the learning environment but because of sleepiness, lack of attentiveness and their own will. These further led to students turning to their phones to recharge themselves, keep them awake, entertained or interested.

Discussion

The first objective of this study is to investigate cyberloafing among EFL learners. The research findings revealed a high level of cyberloafing among EFL learners. First, the finding showed that sharing was the most prevalent form of cyberloafing among EFL learners during classes. This finding aligned with Kusumastuti et al., (2024) who discovered that the majority of students engage in social cyberloafing such as browsing social media platforms, and Twum et al. (2021) who identified the highly ranked cyberloafing activity among students was online chatting. Similarly, Toker & Baturay (2021) found that students were involved in cyberloafing mainly for socialization. The high level of engagement in sharing activities suggested that students seek social connection and entertainment during class.

Second, the recent study revealed that shopping indicated a medium yet substantial level of cyberloafing among EFL learners. This finding confirmed prior studies carried out by Chrisnatalia et al. (2023) who revealed that shopping was quite common to be done by students in the class to refresh themselves, and Mei et al. (2021) who stated that shopping cyberloafing was not a primary distraction for students due to the time and attention it required. While shopping may not be the most frequent form of cyberloafing, it still played a crucial role in distracting students during class.

Third, the research findings also demonstrated a high level of engagement of real-time updating cyberloafing among EFL learners. This finding validated a study conducted by Tatli and Sadik (2021) who revealed that news follow up as the common cyberloafing behaviours. Additionally, Ozdamli and Ercag (2021) also found that students primarily engaged in browsing-related cyberloafing, specifically visiting websites about news and sports. These consistencies across studies highlighted how real-time updating was common form of cyberloafing that acted as a distraction in learning environments.

Fourth, the current study described that accessing online content also reflected a high level of engagement among EFL learners. The research finding was consistent with a research by Mei et al. (2021) who discovered that accessing online content to be the

most profound cyberloafing in educational settings. Çay et al. (2022) further indicated that accessing online content as the most frequent form of cyberloafing particularly in listening to music. This behaviour regularly occurred among students when the environment had easy access to digital devices.

Fifth, the findings of the study revealed that gaming and gambling activities were the least common forms of cyberloafing among EFL learners. The finding justified an earlier studies conducted by Kusumastuti et al. (2024) who reported that leisure activities, such as playing games, were not commonly practiced among students during class hours, and Koay (2018) who found that betting or gambling online and visiting betting or gambling sites, were the least performed cyberloafing activities among students. The infrequency of gaming and gambling cyberloafing suggested that while these activities were highly engaging, they were less accessible or acceptable during class time.

Overall, the current study revealed that cyberloafing among EFL learners was at a high level, with an average score of 3.43. This finding aligned with prior studies conducted by Mei et al. (2021), Twum et al. (2021) and Varol and Yildirim (2019), indicating widespread cyberloafing likely influenced by common factors. However, several studies such as by Çay et al. (2022), Şenel (2019), Güllü and Serin (2020), Ananda et al. (2023), identified medium level of cyberloafing whereas Talan and Kalinkara (2022) and Tatli and Sadik (2021) found a low level of cyberloafing among students. Although a high level of cyberloafing has been discovered in the current study and several others, it is evident that there can be significant variation in the extent of this behaviour.

Furthermore, the second research objective is to investigate the reasons for EFL learners to engage in cyberloafing. The research findings identified several factors contributing to cyberloafing among EFL learners, categorized into lecturer-related, course-related, and student-related factors. Lecturer-related reasons highlighted the significant role of lecturers in influencing student engagement. It revealed that monotonous teaching methods, one way communication, long explanation and lack of interactive media often led to disengagement. This finding was aligned with previous studies by Varol and Yıldırım (2019) who identified lecturers' pedagogical knowledge as critical factors in reducing cyberloafing, and Gardini et al. (2024) who noted that effective teaching approaches increased student motivation. Furthermore, Twum et al. (2021) found that limited teaching methods were a significant factor in students seeking distractions. These suggested that lectures must be capable of other various teaching methods to maintain students' engagement.

Course-related factors focused on illustrating the finding of the current study which indicated that peer-presentations often delivered in a monotonous and unengaging manner, led students to turn to their phones for entertainment. This finding reinforced with Akgun (2019) who identified low interest and difficult to understand course content as factors driving cyberloafing. However, the current study highlighted the poor quality of peer-presentations in delivering course content that drove students to participate in cyberloafing. The study suggested that even when the course content itself may be of interest, the delivery method applied during the learning process can affect its effectiveness.

Student-related factors primarily involved boredom and a short attention which influenced EFL learners to engage in cyberloafing. This finding aligned with Kusumastuti et al. (2024) who revealed students majorly engaged in cyberloafing as recovery behaviour to alleviate boredom and academic stress, and Toker & Baturay (2021) who linked student amotivation to increased cyberloafing. It indicated that the root cause of

cyberloafing often lied in the students' internal states, such as their level of interest and attentiveness.

While the research findings provided valuable insights into the level and reasons of why EFL learners engage in cyberloafing, its limited scope was a notable weakness. Although the research filled an important gap by focusing on cyberloafing among EFL learners, the study would benefit from a more thorough investigation of the ways in which cultural, institutional, or societal factors impact cyberloafing behaviours, as these factors may differ among areas, backgrounds and educational systems. Additionally, future research could expand on examining effects of cyberloafing toward students' academic over the time and uncovering strategies to overcome it effectively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted on cyberloafing among EFL learners of English Department, the study revealed that cyberloafing among EFL learners was found to be at a high level. Sharing is the most prevalent cyberloafing behaviour among students during class time, followed by real-time updating, and accessing online content. The study also showed that the factors contributing to cyberloafing were various, including lecturer-related issues such as unengaging teaching methods, course-related factors like monotonous peer-presentations, and student-related factors such as boredom and short attention spans.

To mitigate cyberloafing behaviours particularly in sharing, real time updating and accessing online content, it is recommended that lecturers and teachers implement more interactive teaching activities, incorporate technology mindfully, guide students on effective peer-presentations, and establish a clear digital device policy during class. Students can also minimize the negative effects of cyberloafing by developing habits with promoting self-regulation learning, practicing mindfulness, engaging in active learning, and establishing digital boundaries. Additionally, further research in broader scope is needed to explore other factors that may contribute to cyberloafing such as cultural, institutional and societal factors, to examine the long-term consequences of cyberloafing and to develop targeted interventions to address it effectively in educational settings.

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