

ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS' USE OF DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR INFORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, HUE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating English-major students' experiences with the use of digital resources for their informal language learning (ILL) at a university in Vietnam. The data collection instruments included questionnaires, which were delivered online to 91 participants, and semi-structured interviews carried out with 12 of these participants. The results show that the students reported to frequently utilize a variety of digital resources for ILL, with online/offline dictionaries and translators, TV programs, YouTube videos, social networking, and language learning sites being the most commonly used. While the findings indicate that AI platforms were not widely used by English-major students due to their recent introduction, most interviewees expressed interest in these new platforms. In addition, the results reveal that students engaged in ILL within both extracurricular and extramural contexts, indicating flexibility in their usage of digital resources. Finally, some implications for EFL teachers and students were provided for optimal use of ILL digital resources.

Keyword: Informal language learning, digital resources, English-major students

1. Introduction

Since there has been a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach, associated with the advancement in technology-based approach in recent years, learners' ability to take charge of and self-regulate their own learning outside the contexts of classroom is increasingly becoming crucial for them to adapt to the changes. In reality, many studies have shown that digital tools such as gaming, mobile devices, social media, video streaming, and online communities had a considerable impact on informal L2 learning with great interest and engagement of learners (Alm, 2015, Chen, 2013; Richards, 2015; Sundqvist, 2019; Wang & Chen, 2019). Furthermore, using digital resources for informal language learning helps learners improve different skills in their English competence with authentic communication opportunities available (Aryati, Widiati, & Riyanto, 2019). Considering the contexts of Vietnamese tertiary education, English-major students are required to attain high levels of proficiency and mastery in English to fulfill the demands of jobs that necessitate in-depth and precise language skills. Consequently, autonomous learning or informal language learning becomes an almost obligatory pursuit for these students if they desire to acquire necessary expertise, and accordingly, digital resources emerge as indispensable tools for their English learning outside instructional contexts, without or with little guidance from their teachers.

In the light of the situations above, the researcher decided to conduct a study to investigate the use of digital resources for informal English learning in Vietnamese educational context where a great number of studies still focus on formal or institutional settings and how teachers apply

technology to teach English. In other words, informal language learning receives quite less attention. Taking the case of English-major students at University of Foreign languages and International Studies, Hue University (HUFLIS), however, due to time limitations in formal language classrooms for English skills, it is difficult for both lecturers and students to cover all knowledge of English and practice using the language frequently, so it is necessary for them to conduct their learning in informal contexts to enhance their English proficiency. On top of that, it is likely that the learners act very differently in an informal learning environment than in the formal learning environment of the classroom (Boo et al., 2015). Hence, the study attempts to explore the implementation practice among English-major undergraduates in an environment that requires a lot of self-study or autonomy. In other words, the paper aims to discover the digital tools the students make use of in informal settings and the conditions of use i.e., frequency, time allocation, and types of learning context to improve their English competence.

1.3 Aims of the study

The most important aim of the research is to explore what digital resources English-major students in HUFLIS utilize for their informal language learning and how they employ these ILL resources. Further suggestions will also be provided in order to help students make more effective use of digital platforms to enhance their informal English learning.

1.4 Research questions

With the aims stated above, the study is conducted to address the following research questions:

1. What digital resources do HUFLIS second-year English-major students use for informal language learning?
2. How do HUFLIS second-year English-major students use digital resources for informal language learning?

Within the scope of this paper, the first research question focuses on examining the types and usage frequency of digital resources for ILL, while the second one addresses participants' time allocation for their use of ILL digital resources and frequency use in two different contexts of learning, including extramural and extracurricular contexts, as stated in the literature review. These focuses were also specifically discussed in the methodology and findings sections.

2. Literature review

2.1 Informal language learning

Informal language learning was first defined by Watkins and Marsik (1992) as a process resulting from learners' experience, occurring beyond formal educational settings in a planned or unplanned manner, which takes place mostly unintentionally, and the involved activities do not specifically aim at learning. Steven (2009), while sharing the same opinion of the intention aspect, added that informal language learning happens in daily life activities related to work, family or leisure, yet he supposed that this process is not structured regarding learning objectives, time and support, and does not lead to certification. This was in line with Cross's claim (2006) of informal learning as "the unofficial, unscheduled, impromptu way people learn to do their jobs

(p.19). However, the matter of whether informal language learning happens incidentally or deliberately has still been a subject of controversy among experts in the field.

According to Benson (2011), there are four dimensions of informal language learning or language learning beyond the classroom including “location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control” (p. 9). As stated by Benson (2011), *location* refers to where and when a language learning activity takes place and can be physical or virtual, which usually refers to out-of-class or in classroom contexts.

The second dimension is the *formality* of the language learning process which addresses whether the learning activity is linked to formal/educational qualifications/certificate or to learners’ personal interest e.g., formal, non-formal, or informal. In other words, this deals with formal or informal contexts of learning. Informal language learning apparently occurs outside of formal educational contexts and often involves spontaneous, unstructured interactions. Learners engage in conversations, listen to authentic materials, or use online resources without the constraints of formal classroom settings.

Regarding *pedagogy* dimension, according to Dressman and Sadler (2020), pedagogy encompasses the various teaching approaches used, including instructional methods, the organized sequence of learning materials, explicit explanations, and assessment practices. In the case of informal language learning, this dimension is considered to decide if the learning process is instructed or non-instructed, or sometimes self-instructed. Learners will take control of their learning process, adopting individualized approaches, and selecting resources and activities that align with their needs and interests.

The last dimension is *locus of control* that relates to the degree to which learners direct their learning compared to others who oversee the learning (Benson, 2011). In the context of learning beyond classroom or informal learning, learners are supposed to be independent and self-regulated and have a higher degree of control and responsibility for their own learning. They set their own goals, make decisions about what, when, and how to learn, and monitor their progress. This dimension highlights the importance of learner autonomy, self-regulation, and the ability to manage one's language learning journey.

These four dimensions of informal language learning and language autonomy—formality, location, pedagogy, and locus of control—help characterize the unique nature of learning a language in informal settings. They highlight the learner's agency, the flexible learning environments, and the learner-centered approaches that are central to informal language acquisition. Chik (2014) added another dimension called Trajectory which refers to how learners manage and regulate their informal learning activities over time. However, this dimension is believed to be challenging to be tracked since it needs observation and investigation for a long period of time.

Based on Benson’s four-dimension framework (2011), the classification of Informal Digital English learning (IDLE) was conceptualized in Table 1 which was adapted from the table Classification of IDLE contexts based on Benson’s four dimensions (2011) in Lee’s (2019) research (p.115).

Table 1. Classification of IDLE contexts

	Informal digital English learning	
	Extracurricular	Extramural
Formality	Semi-structured; Certification	Unstructured; No certification
Location	Out-of-class	Out-of-class
Pedagogy	Self-instructed	Naturalistic
Locus of Control	Self-directed	Self-directed

As can be seen from Table 1, IDLE is a process that can occur in two different contexts with different characteristics regarding four dimensions: formality, location, pedagogy, and locus of control. Firstly, *in extracurricular contexts*, IDLE is self-directed, self-instructed, with the use of digital resources in semi-structured, out-of-class contexts. The learning process is not part of the formal language program but still linked to it. For example, students take primary responsibility for completing homework or group projects through self-instruction outside of the classroom. However, while teachers still provide partial structure and evaluate students' performance, the learning experience is primarily driven by the students themselves. On the other hand, *IDLE in extramural contexts* refers to self-directed, naturalistic digital learning of English in unstructured environments that are independent of a formal language program. For example, students may engage in casual conversations with English speakers on platforms like Facebook purely for socializing purposes. In this case, the learning activity is not structured or evaluated by teachers and takes place outside of any school-related assignments. This study adopts the concept of IDLE in both **extracurricular and extramural contexts** as a guiding principle to explore the research.

All in all, in the scope of this paper, the concept of informal language learning is regarded as a process that incidentally or intentionally occurs outside classroom or institutional settings with students self-directing their learning; the process might or might not lead to qualifications, or it can be merely for entertaining purposes.

2.2 The use of digital resources for informal language learning

Digital resources can be understood as digital materials, tools, and systems, such as websites, social media, online games, multimedia and mobile phones, which are available through the Internet and can be used to support various activities such as learning, communication, collaboration, and productivity. These resources include but are not limited to, learning management systems (LMS), webinars, online forums or communities (such as Reddit, Discord, etc.), video conferencing, social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), blogs, podcasts, and mobile applications. In the context of language learning, digital technologies have been increasingly used for language learning in recent years, providing learners with various opportunities to access authentic language materials, interact with other learners and native speakers, and receive immediate feedback. The use of digital resources has become particularly significant for informal language learning. For example, the same authors found that mobile technologies, such as smartphones, were used extensively for language learning outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the findings of Trinder's (2017) study, which involved examining the practices and preferences of 175 Austrian university students regarding new media usage in self-

directed informal online learning, indicate that television series and films are the most popular learning resources in terms of both the frequency of use and skill acquisition. Other digital resources were also mentioned in Trinder's study with high frequency of use, including Online dictionaries, Social networks, Online news sites/journals, etc.

In a paper by Alm (2015), social media like Facebook was found as a platform where learners have opportunities to observe and to participate in real conversations, so the language they learned and used is more real and applicable, and these conversations enabled them to use the colloquial language they learned during their exchange and to pick up new words and conversational techniques or phrases. Social media was also acknowledged as one of the most popular resources used by Indonesian students in a study carried out by Inayati and Karifianto (2022). These authors also highlighted the use of video-sharing platforms that received a high preference among learners. In particular, the participants also reported that social media posts that were in English, including the threaded comments, became a useful source of exposure in their informal language learning environment.

In another paper by Yurieva, Musiichuk, and Baisan (2021), it indicated that students also watch YouTube videos or films to expose themselves to authentic language and examples of phrases. Moreover, in this study, the researchers listed out a wide range of digital resources that were made use of by language learners, namely, Text or voice messages, news websites, online courses related to topics other than language learning, online or downloading e-books, language learning sites (British Council, BBC learning English, etc.), blogs, podcast/ radio and discussion forum (which is the least used). In the specific context of Vietnamese students, a few studies have investigated the use of digital technologies for language learning. A study conducted by Ba (2018), which investigated Internet use in promoting business learners' autonomy and improving their learning skill, revealed that YouTube and Google Translation are the two most popular websites or tools to study English online by the participants.

The research also looks into the utility of AI platforms like Chatbot, which have recently arisen strongly throughout the world and began a new era where human tasks are gradually conducted by a so-called robot creature. In the Vietnamese educational context, AI Chatbots like ChatGPT or Bing AI are not officially recognized in formal or academic settings, but only used by a number of students outside their classrooms for supporting their studies and knowledge acquisition. Lu et al. (2006) suggested that learners regard Chatbots as partners and engage in regular conversations with them to improve their L2 abilities, and this platform also provides records of conversation, which is convenient for future review. Students, through conversations with the Chatbot, can search for any knowledge and information, ask questions about language knowledge including vocabulary, grammar or even ask the Chatbot to produce ideas for their assignments. In return, these AI-based Chatbots managed to accomplish their tasks in an organized and modest way, not regarding the quality of their products as these require more rigid and thorough considerations and investigations.

Taking everything into consideration, while these studies comprehensively address the most significant issues concerning language learning in informal contexts, beyond the classroom, there remains gaps in understanding how English-major learners utilize specific digital resources and technologies for their informal English learning. In particular, in the era with the rapid and continuous progression of technology, more and more modern and versatile digital platforms have

been created, like Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms, which means that EFL learners have more diverse choices of tools and ways to self-learn the target language. Therefore, a study is essential to explore this diversity and fill the mentioned gaps.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a mixed methods approach which integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods using questionnaires and interviews to offer the best potential for the answer. According to Johnson and Turner (2003), the fundamental principle of mixed research requires researchers to collect multiple data combining various approaches, strategies, and methods, which is more likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses. Within the context of the research, this combination enabled the conductor to explore both overall and detailed experience of language learners on the implementation of digital technology in informal language learning. The practice and students' perspectives of using digital resources for informal language learning could be fully investigated applying both characteristics of quantitative research (e.g., statistical analysis, standardized data collection, etc.) and those of qualitative research (e.g., induction, discovery, exploration, etc.). Furthermore, the reliability and validity of the study could be obtained and increased thanks to the use of multiple data sources and methods in mixed methods research, which allowed for cross-validation and reducing bias (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.2 Participants of the study

The participants of the study were 91 English-major students from HUFLIS, who were in the second year of their program. The reason for choosing the participants is that they were currently attending courses on four English skills, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking in their second-year curriculum. Therefore, they were likely to be open to the idea of investing time in informal learning using digital technologies to improve their language skills. Convenience sampling was employed to recruit participants from the English Department of the university. This method of sampling was chosen primarily because of the willingness of the students to participate in the study.

3.3 Research instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The quantitative approach was employed in this study with the facilitation of questionnaires. This instrument was selected since it enables the collection of the data from a large number of participants, which made it easier to reach an accurate generalized conclusion. Brown (1988) figured out that questionnaires are more effective for gathering information on a large scale than other instruments. Furthermore, questionnaires provide a variety of items, ranging from closed ended to open-ended with various sorts of selection items, or Likert scale with different levels along the continuum (Cohen, 2011). In the light of that, a survey with both closed-ended and open-ended questions was integrated to elicit data about the students' use of digital technologies for informal language learning and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these tools.

The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in the form of an online survey via Google form. The questionnaire included two major sections: *Participants' demographic information, Participants' use of Digital resources for Informal language learning.*

In the first section, participants' demographics including their names or emails (optional), genders, majors, and self-rated English proficiency were collected.

The second section, which was used to investigate the practice of students' use of digital resources for informal language learning, consisted of 1 open-ended item and 3 closed-ended ones in the form of 19 5-point Likert scale items. The two Likert scales ranges from 1 to 5 (Never (N), Rarely (R), Sometimes (S), Often (O), and Always (A)) to evaluate the frequency of participants' use of various digital resources and that in different informal language learning contexts with distinct aims (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the main categories in the questionnaire

Clusters	Sub-clusters	Items
ILL digital resources used	Types and frequency of use of different digital resources for ILL	Item 6.1 - 6.17
How ILL digital resources are used	Time allocation for ILL digital resources	Item 5
	Frequency of use of digital resources in two different contexts (extramural and extracurricular) with distinct aims	Item 8.1 and 8.2

In item 8.1 and 8.2, there are two contexts and aims for using digital resources for informal language learning.

- Context and Aim A: To learn on students' own, outside classroom, with a little teachers' control or guidance, to fulfil academic goals in language classrooms (still linked to the university program).
- Context and Aim B: To learn on students' own, outside classroom, for personal needs (entertaining, socializing, etc.), BUT not related to university program, and without teachers' control.

The participants were required to answer the following question by ticking in the appropriate box, regarding the frequency use of digital resources in these two contexts.

“How frequently do you use the above-mentioned digital resources (you claim using) in these two contexts?”

Context & aims of using digital resources for informal language learning (ILL)	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
8.1. Context and Aim A					
8.2. Context and Aim B					

3.3.2 Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants due to their willingness, which focuses on detailed information and insights into participants' experiences and attitudes towards digital technology use for informal language learning. The reason behind the decision to opt for this qualitative instrument lies in its possibilities of gaining deep understanding of the investigated issue and the possible emergence of new issues related to the topic during the

interview process. Particularly, semi-structured interviews are claimed to allow for new matters to arise along the way (Lodico et al., 2010). This instrument also helps the researchers to understand the meaning and interpretation of responses, especially the quantitative data, from the participants regarding their behavior or events (Bowling, 2014; Hennink et al., 2011). The interview prompts concentrated on participants' explanations and clarification of their answers in the questionnaires, with questions relating to the following domains: their type of digital resources used for their informal language learning and reasons behind their choices of these digital resources for informal language learning. The interviews were carried out in Vietnamese in order to minimize any misunderstandings and anxiety during the interview, and they can be comfortable to express themselves clearly. The interviews will be audio-recorded with the permission from the participants and later be transcribed into English for analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire was interpreted through descriptive statistics, which was used to describe general features and trends of the data and to find out the most frequently responded views. The results from the questionnaires were calculated and analyzed by SPSS software. After being processed, the frequencies of these survey responses were expressed as percentages. For Likert-scale items, means scores and standard deviations were also calculated to show the tendency of students' experience in integrating Digital technologies in informal English learning to improve English skills. The quantitative data was then visualized using tables, bar charts, and pie charts.

For qualitative analysis, all of the interviews were transcribed and translated from Vietnamese into English. None of the participants were addressed by their real names so as to protect their confidentiality. Instead, the interviewed students would be coded as S1, S2, S3, etc. In this study, interview transcripts would be analyzed carefully using thematic content analysis to gain detailed and insightful description under the discussed topic. The data from the survey participants will be combined with the interview data (using quotations) to be compared and synthesized to provide detailed interpretations.

4. Findings

4.1 Types and frequency use of digital resources for ILL

Table 3 illustrates the frequency of participants' use of different digital resources for informal language learning associated with mean scores and SD scores of listed categories.

Table 3. Frequency of participants' use of digital resource for ILL

Resources	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
6.1. I use online/ offline dictionaries/translator (e.g., Cambridge, Oxford, T-flat, Google Translator, etc.) to look up new words	1.1%	1.1%	7.7%	30.8%	59.3%	4.46	0.779
6.2. I use TV programs /films/movies	1.1%	12.1%	39.6%	37.4%	9.9%	3.43	0.871
6.3. I use YouTube videos	1.1%	7.7%	23.1%	41.8%	26.4%	3.85	0.942
6.4. I use Social networking (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)	0%	2.2%	24.2%	37.4%	36.3%	4.08	0.833

6.5. I use Online news sites/journals/magazines (e.g., CNN, The New York Times, The Guardian, etc.)	7.7%	36.3%	36.3%	18.7%	1.1%	2.69	0.903
6.6. I use E-books (online or downloading)	9.9%	25.3%	30.8%	28.6%	5.5%	2.95	1.079
6.7. I use Forum discussion (e.g., Reddit, Discord, etc.)	16.5%	34.1%	38.5%	8.8%	2.2%	2.46	0.946
6.8. I use Text or voice chat (e.g., Skype, Messenger, etc.)	9.9%	26.4%	31.9%	19.8%	12.1%	2.98	1.164
6.9. I use Video chatting (e.g., Zalo, Messengers, Skype, Facetime, etc.)	8.8%	29.7%	28.6%	20.9%	12.1%	2.98	1.164
6.10. I use Blogs	35.2%	33%	22%	8.8%	1.1%	2.08	1.014
6.11. I use Podcast/Radio	11%	18.7%	39.6%	22%	8.8%	2.99	1.100
6.12. I use Emailing	23.1%	34.1%	25.3%	13.2%	4.4%	2.42	1.116
6.13. I use Language learning sites (e.g., BBC, CNN, British Council, etc.)	6.6%	13.2%	40.7%	30.8%	8.8%	3.22	1.009
6.14. I use Online courses not related to English language learning (e.g., marketing, business, design, etc.)	20.9%	33%	30.8%	11%	4.4%	2.45	1.078
6.15. I use Online courses related to English language learning (e.g., IELTS, TOEIC, not belonging to the HUFLIS English Programs)	6.6%	18.7%	39.6%	24.2%	11%	3.14	1.060
6.16. I use AI platform (chat GPT, Bing AI, etc.)	17.6%	19.8%	33%	18.7%	11%	2.86	1.234
6.17. I use Mobile applications for language learning (e.g., ELSA, Duolingo, etc.)	3.3%	25.3%	36.3%	22%	13.2%	3.16	1.057

The mean score interpretation was based on the table below, according to (Moidunny, 2009):

Table 4. Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00-1.80	Very Low
1.81-2.60	Low
2.61-3.20	Medium
3.21-4.20	High
4.21-5.00	Very High

Source: Moidunny (2009)

As can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4, second-year English-major students at HULIS used the majority of the listed digital resources for their ILL. It is also obvious that 4 out of 17 listed digital resources including *TV programs /films/movies*, *YouTube videos*, *Social networking*, and *Language learning sites* fell into the high category, which means that they received high frequency of use from the participants. On top of that, *Online/ offline dictionaries/translator*, whose mean score is 4.46, fell into the frequency level of very high use and ranked the first the table in term of frequency of use. In other words, these types of digital resources were the most frequently used by the researched students. In particular, the majority of the survey respondents reported that they used *Online/Offline dictionaries/translators* on an “Often” and “Always” basis (90.1%), while these significant levels of frequency were also seen for *YouTube videos* and *Social networking* with 68.2% and 73.7% respectively.

With the mean scores ranging from 2.61 to 3.20, *Online news sites/journals/ magazines, E-books, Text or voice chat, Video chatting, Podcast/Radio, Online courses related to English language learning, AI platforms, and Mobile applications for language learning* were reported to fall within the frequency level of medium use by the respondents. The data also revealed that over one third of the English majored second-year students “sometimes” employed these sorts of digital platforms. By contrast, the lowest mean frequency scores were witnessed in 4 digital resources, namely *Forum discussion, Blogs, Emailing, and Online courses not related to English language learning*, ranging from 2.08 to 2.46. These low used resources were reported to be “Never” and “Rarely” exploited by the majority of over 50 percent of the respondents, meaning that these types were not popular with the researched participants. Besides the given digital resources, three surveyed students reported to learn English informally via another type of resources, namely Online Games.

When asked about the reasons why the participants use these digital resources for their ILL, the interviewees provided a fairly diverse range of reasons, all related to the benefits of most frequently used resources. The preference can be firstly attributed to the update and the diversity of knowledge of various topics for learning provided by these resources (S1, S9). Moreover, user-friendliness (S5) and the familiarity of these digital platforms to students’ daily life (S2) were also mentioned as the reasons behind students’ choices, and students also prefer these resources because of their easy and free accessibility as there are a wide range of resources are free to be used and downloaded, so students can access them flexibly regardless of time and location (S12).

“The sources of knowledge and information from these digital resources are new and up-to-date, and a lot of knowledge and information are not found in textbooks or reference books. Moreover, these platforms supply rich and diverse knowledge for me to learn English.” (S1)

“Many platforms and applications that I use are user-friendly with many supporting features, which makes it quicker and more convenient to access information. Particularly, the information is integrated into one platform, so it is easier and more timesaving to look for information.” (S5)

“Digital resources like social media and video-sharing platforms are quite familiar to students like us as they are used for different purposes such as communicating, updating news, entertaining. Therefore, we can easily incorporate these resources into our ILL.” (S2)

“I am interested in these digital technologies because they are easy to access. Especially, many resources are free and available for download, so I can use them whenever needed, without any time or location limitations.” (S12)

“I choose to use digital resources as English knowledge and other learning materials are available on these resources with a wide range of topics, so I have more choices of my favorite learning topic easily.” (S9)

4.2. Participants’ time allocation and contexts of using digital resources for ILL

4.2.1 Participants’ time allocation for ILL digital resources

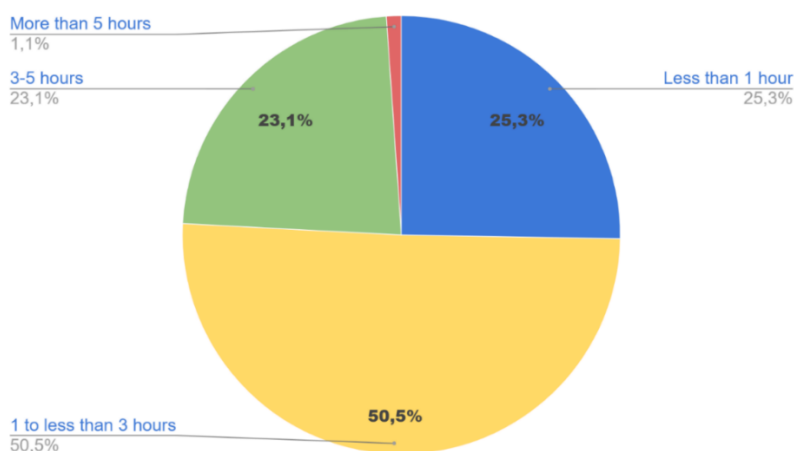


Figure 1. Students' daily time allocation for ILL using digital resources

As indicated in Figure 1, most of the participants reported that they spent 1 to less than 3 hours per day (50.5%) using digital resources for their Informal language learning, whereas roughly a quarter of the survey participants used digital platforms for less than 1 hour per day. One positive sign which can be inferred from the illustrated figures was that 23.1% of the respondents allocated 3 to 5 hours every day using technology for their English learning beyond classroom contexts, which was a significant rate. Very few students said that they spent more than 5 hours per day on ILL digital resources with only 1.1%.

4.2.2 Frequency of participants' use of digital resources in different contexts of ILL

Table 5 and Figure 2 illustrated the Mean score, SD score, and percentage of students' use of digital resources for two different ILL contexts with two distinct aims, including extracurricular context with academic goals and extramural context with personal purposes.

Table 5. Mean score and SD score of Frequency of individuals' use of digital resources in different ILL contexts

Resources	M	SD
8.1. Context and Aim A (extracurricular)	3,56	0,833
8.2. Context and Aim B (extramural)	3,62	0,986

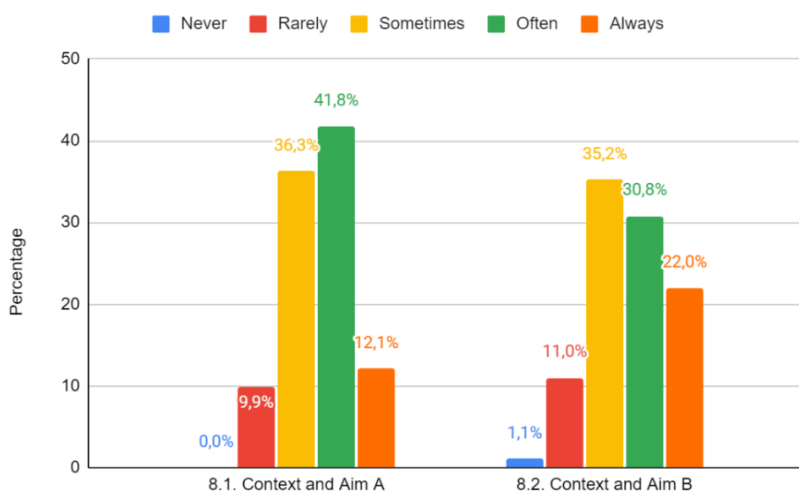


Figure 2. Percentage of individuals' use of digital resources in different ILL contexts

In the extracurricular contexts for ILL (Context A), students are supposed to learn on their own, with a little teachers' control or guidance, to fulfil academic goals in their language classroom, but this is still linked to the university program. For example, students completed their assignment through self-instruction (watching YouTube tutorial videos or seeking online articles), outside of the classroom. They control their learning by themselves and have their own strategies. Meanwhile, the extramural contexts (Context B) are defined as the process in which students learn on their own, outside classroom, for personal needs (entertaining, socializing, etc.), but not related to university program, and without teachers' control. For example, students, on their own initiative, chat casually with other English users on social networks for socializing, and this activity is not part of school assignments.

As can be seen from Table 5, the mean scores of two categories fall into the high level with 3.56 for extracurricular contexts and 3.62 for extramural contexts, which means that the respondents employed these types of resources in both situations with quite similar levels of frequency. In other words, digital resources were utilized to both fulfil their academic objectives and for their personal demands like entertaining or socializing. The role of teachers can be seen or not, depending on learners' purposes when using ILL tools. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the percentage of individuals who 'often' use digital resources in the first context with academic goals were the highest with 41.8%, whereas that of extramural settings for personal needs accounted for lower figure of only 30.8%. By contrast, the figure for "Always" in Context B (extramural) was higher than that in Context A (extracurricular), with 22% for the former compared to 12.1% for the latter. It is also noticeable that no one reported to "never" use digital resources in Context and Aim A (extracurricular), while 1.1% of the participants were seen in Context and Aim B (extramural).

5. Discussion

Based on the results obtained through qualitative and quantitative data analysis, these findings will be discussed and presented with regard to the two major research questions.

5.1 Types and frequency use of digital resources for ILL by second-year English-major students

The responses to the questionnaire items 6.1 to 6.17 indicate that second-year English-major students at HULIS used the majority of the listed digital resources for their ILL, at an above-average level of frequency. The data revealed that online and offline dictionaries and translators hold the first place among all listed digital resources in terms of frequency use, which was in line with the results in studies by Trinder's (2017) and Yurieva, Musiichuk, and Baisan (2021). It can stem from the fact this type of digital resources exerts a direct impact on learners' understanding and comprehension of English as vocabulary is the fundamental element that facilitates the learning process of other English skills and knowledge. According to Nation (2011), in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while Nunan (1991), furthermore, argue that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is crucial for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, learners will not be able to apply the structures and functions they have learned for comprehensible communication.

Furthermore, TV programs /films/movies, YouTube videos, Social networking, and Language learning sites were highly preferred by the majority of second-year English-major students. The positive results for TV programs/films/movies, YouTube videos, and Social networks, which was also in agreement with the outcomes drawn from Trinder's (2017) study, brought little surprise since apart from the aspects of language learning, these resources contain entertaining factors which might require little effort in their learning procedure and thus might bring them enjoyment while learning. According to Allen et al. (2014), language learners' enjoyment was identified to be the key factor for their overall engagement and motivation. However, the appearance of Language learning sites in the top rankings seemed to be worth noticing because this contradicted Trinder's (2017) findings as it is suggested that these sites required deliberate study and serious endeavor from learners. As students suggested, their preference for these highly used resources results from different factors, including the latest updates and diversity of knowledge and information provided by these platforms, their user-friendliness, their familiarity, and easy accessibility.

Other resources such as Online news sites/journals/ magazines, E-books, Text or voice chat, Video chatting, Podcast/Radio, Online courses related to English language learning, AI platforms, and Mobile applications for language learning were also used by the students, but to a medium extent. In particular, although Text or voice chat and Video chatting are commonly used the students in their daily life, these platforms are not extremely favored for English-major students' personal language learning environments, which is in conformity with the claim in Trinder's (2017) research, namely chatting and texting played a very minor role in students' informal language contexts. Very few interviewees reported themselves texting, voice chatting or making video call with other foreign English speakers. In the context of Vietnamese education, it can be explained that these communication technologies require much interaction and communication competence. Meanwhile, English learners in Vietnam are evaluated to be quite shy and hesitant to communicate in English, and their learning environment places a greater emphasis on knowledge and grammar rather than communicative competence, which can hinder students' confidence when utilizing these resources. Hence, they might avoid these high-risk communication experiments which probably cause negative social judgment (Lam & Arisandy, 2019). Interestingly, although the findings of the study indicate that AI platforms are not utilized by a large number of English-major students due to their recent emergence in the last few years, most interviewees showed their interest in the use of this new platforms. What is more, there is little doubt when Forum discussion, Blogs, Emailing, and Online courses not related to English language learning are revealed to be the least frequently used digital resources as they might be least relevant and straightforward to students' language learning, but rather related to other fields. Besides the given digital resources, three surveyed students reported to learn English informally via another type of resources, namely Online Games.

5.2 Second-year English-major students' time allocation and contexts of using digital resources for ILL

When it comes to how second-year English-major students at HUFLIS utilize digital resources for their informal English learning, the data about students' time allocation revealed a moderate results; namely, the majority of students reported that they spent about 1 to 3 hours per day for their ILL with digital resources while merely one quarter of them allocated 3 to 5 hours

per day, which can be seen as a humble rate as their major is English language. The first reason for this could be that the participants were just in their second year of university, so they have not fully developed their autonomous ability. Secondly, this can be attributed to students' hesitation and lack of confidence in using digital resources due to the lack of guidance and uncertainty regarding the quality and the effectiveness of the learning materials. The lack of quality control over the content of resources available online was claimed to be one of the major challenges when learners apply ILL digital materials (Lee & Kwon, 2011).

Regarding the contexts in which HUFLIS second year English-major student conduct their ILL with the usage of digital resources, students' informal digital learning was reported to occur in both extracurricular and extramural contexts. In other words, students are flexible when using digital resources to learn English by themselves, both for academic purposes and personal needs, depending on different situations. On the one hand, their learning process is outside classroom contexts, not part of the formal language programs but still linked to it, sometimes with little teachers' guidance on what resources should be exploited. For example, students reported that when they were assigned to write an essay for a course at university, they often used ChatGPT to search for information and ideas as references on their own. Sometimes, their lecturers suggested some other digital platforms which can support them with their assignments, but eventually the decision on used tools totally depends on the students themselves. On the other hand, the findings indicated that students learned English on their own, in unstructured environments that are independent of institutional contexts, for merely personal demands. For example, students revealed that they often watch English movies or YouTube videos just for entertainment and let the learning process occur with the naturalistic approach. Therefore, it can be concluded that two contexts of informal digital language learning (extracurricular and extramural) proposed by Lee (2019) appeared in this study.

6. Conclusions

From the achieved findings, there are some pedagogical implications for both EFL university students and lecturers. As for EFL students, the study informed about a wide range of ILL digital resources used for specific English skills and components, as well as different ways to exploit these resources by the research students. This can act as reference resources for EFL students who do not know how to start their LLBC.

Concerning the implications for EFL lecturers, the findings highlighted that students' ways of incorporating digital resources in their ILL seem to diversify, not be consistent and scientifically supported. Therefore, it is essential for lecturers to develop a framework with consistent principles on which students can apply digital technologies in their ILL without confusion and uncertainty. Furthermore, the findings revealed students' strong preference for digital dictionaries and translators, social media, video-sharing platforms, and specific learning language sites for their informal language learning, it is recommended that language instructors integrate these platforms more frequently into their teaching strategies in formal contexts, which can also facilitate learner' informal learning environments in parallel.

The study investigated the English-major students' experiences with the usage of digital resources for their informal language learning. The findings indicated that second-year English-major students at HUFLIS employ a wide range of digital resources to enhance their English proficiency to at an above-average level of frequency. Notably, Online and offline dictionaries and translators emerged as the most frequently used resources, providing essential support for vocabulary acquisition and language comprehension. In addition, students showed a strong preference for audiovisual digital resources such as TV programs/films/movies, YouTube videos, and social networking platforms. The appeal of these resources can be attributed to their authentic and interactive nature, combining language learning with entertainment, as well as the motivational impact of enjoyable learning experiences. Besides, language learning sites, despite their academic and serious nature, ranked quite prominently. These afore-mentioned digital resources were particularly favored for students' ILL use due to their beneficial factors including regular updates, information diversity, user-friendliness, familiarity, and easy accessibility. Moreover, the study found moderate use of other resources, with AI platforms showing potential despite their recent introduction. Furthermore, the majority of students reported dedicating a medium number of hours for their ILL digital resources. This allocation may reflect students' subtle transition into autonomous language learners in their second year of university, which can stem from their lack of confidence due to concerns about resource quality and insufficient instructors' guidance. Considering students' learning contexts and aims, students engaged in ILL within both extracurricular and extramural contexts, indicating flexibility in their usage of digital resources. The findings emphasized the significance of unstructured learning environments outside formal classroom settings, where students employed digital resources for both academic purposes and personal needs. In conclusion, these findings contributed to the understanding of ILL digital resources practices of students in Vietnamese tertiary education context.

Although this study offered insights into the use of digital resources for students' informal language learning with practical implications for both EFL university learners and lecturers, it still has some limitations that need to be taken into consideration. First, the scope of the research was limited with the participation of only 91 second year English-major students at HUFLIS in

the survey questionnaire and 10 of them taking part in the interview section. Hence, it is difficult to generalize the findings to the whole sample of English-major students at HUFLIS as well as other institutions, where the EFL teaching and learning environments, students' proficiency, as well as other factors are different, so the conclusions drawn from the research might be not relevant to other contexts. Moreover, due to the researchers' inadequacy of time, experience, and knowledge, the study did not thoroughly address some issues.

There are some recommendations and directions for further studies on the related topic in the future. Firstly, to make the results more reliable and valid, the scope of the study should be expanded with more participants. It could include the participations of English-major students of four undergraduate year levels at HULIS or at other universities in Vietnam. Another direction for further research can be the investigation of the relationship between the usage of ILL digital resources and a range of factors, which may encompass variables related to learners, such as genders, fields of study, and levels of English language proficiency. Finally, as the current study identified the potential of AI platforms for English language learning, there is a call for further exploration in this emerging digital resource.

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KHẢO SÁT VIỆC SỬ DỤNG CÁC NGUỒN TÀI NGUYÊN KỸ THUẬT SỐ CHO VIỆC TỰ HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ NGOÀI LỚP HỌC (INFORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING) CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ, ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu được tiến hành để điều tra trải nghiệm của sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh về việc sử dụng tài nguyên số cho việc học ngoại ngữ bên ngoài trường lớp tại một trường đại học Việt Nam. Các phương tiện thu thập dữ liệu bao gồm bảng khảo sát trực tuyến được gửi đến 91 sinh viên tham gia, và cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc được tiến hành với 12 sinh viên trong số đó. Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy sinh viên thường xuyên sử dụng nhiều loại tài nguyên số cho việc học ngoại ngữ ngoài lớp học, trong đó, từ điển và công cụ dịch trực tuyến/ offline, chương trình truyền hình, video trên YouTube, mạng xã hội và các trang web học ngoại ngữ được sử dụng phổ biến nhất. Mặc dù các kết quả cho thấy các nền tảng trí tuệ nhân tạo (AI) không được sử dụng rộng rãi bởi sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh do chỉ mới xuất hiện trong vài năm gần đây, nhưng hầu hết những người được phỏng vấn đều thể hiện sự hứng thú đối với tiềm năng của AI. Ngoài ra, kết quả cũng cho thấy rằng sinh viên tự học ngoại ngữ ngoài lớp học trong cả 2 bối cảnh: tách biệt khỏi chương trình học, chỉ cho mục đích cá nhân và bối cảnh sử dụng tài liệu số để một phần phục vụ cho chương trình học. Điều này thể hiện tính linh hoạt trong việc sử dụng tài liệu số của sinh viên. Cuối cùng, nghiên cứu đưa ra một số hệ quả đối với giáo viên và sinh viên tiếng Anh để tối ưu hóa việc sử dụng tài nguyên số cho việc học ngoại ngữ ngoài trường lớp.

Từ khóa: Tự học ngoại ngữ ngoài lớp học, tài nguyên số, sinh viên chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh