STUDENTS' VIEWS ON USING TECHNOLOGY FOR ENGLISH LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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***Abstract**: This article investigated how students used technological tools for studying English outside classrooms, aiming to understand their usage frequency, challenges, and benefits. Using a quantitative research approach, data was collected via structured questionnaires from 400 students during the fourth semester of the 2023--2024 academic year. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that a majority of students frequently utilized mobile apps, YouTube, online dictionaries, and social media groups for language learning. These tools offered flexible, personalized learning experiences and enabled self-paced study, real-time collaboration, and engagement with authentic content. However, students also encountered notable obstacles such as poor internet connectivity, inadequate devices, and difficulty in selecting effective tools among numerous options. Despite these challenges, the findings indicated a generally positive perception of the educational value of technology-assisted English learning. The study provided insights for educators and curriculum designers to better support students by enhancing digital literacy, improving access to technological resources, and offering guidance on selecting appropriate tools. These implications contribute to shaping more effective, tech-integrated language learning strategies in an evolving educational landscape. Future research could explore the in-class use of these tools and employ mixed methods to gain deeper insights.*

***Keywords**: Technological tools, English, outside classrooms, students, perspectives.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has revolutionized education, particularly in the field of language learning. With the proliferation of mobile applications, online platforms, interactive websites, and social media, students today have unprecedented access to English language resources outside the traditional classroom. These tools provide flexibility, personalization, and autonomy, enabling learners to engage with authentic language in immersive and meaningful ways (Wang & Vásquez, 2018; Brown & Davis, 2021).

This study is grounded in the concepts of self-directed learning and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL). For the purpose of this research, "technological

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tools" are defined as digital applications and platforms such as mobile apps, online dictionaries, YouTube, and social media groups that facilitate language acquisition outside of formal instruction. "Perceived benefits" refer to the advantages learners identify from using these tools, including flexibility, autonomy, and collaborative opportunities.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the benefits of engaging in English language learning beyond formal instruction. Ewert and Tomlinson (2019), as well as Bin-Hady (2021), demonstrated that learners who regularly participated in activities such as watching English-language films, reading literature, and joining language exchange communities exhibited higher levels of fluency and communicative competence. Similarly, Li (2018) emphasized the positive impact of interactive conversations with native speakers and participation in online exchange platforms, which contributed to significant gains in listening comprehension, speaking ability, and intercultural understanding.

The role of technological tools in vocabulary development has also been documented. Jones and Smith (2020), along with Widya Accarya (2024), found that students who accessed digital content such as podcasts, books, and video materials developed a broader vocabulary range and a better grasp of idiomatic expressions compared to those who relied solely on classroom instruction. Cultural competence was further underscored by Chen and Chen (2017), who found that learners engaging in cultural exchange activities improved their understanding of cultural nuances and enhanced their intercultural communication skills when using technological tools.

In addition to this, technological tools have also been linked to increased learner motivation and engagement. Wang and Vasquez (2018) observed that the use of mobile applications offering gamified learning and personalized content significantly improved learners' vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, and overall motivation. Brown and Davis (2021) echoed this by noting that exposure to contemporary English usage through platforms such as social media and podcasts allowed learners to stay updated with evolving language trends and slang, thus improving their real-world communicative abilities.

In addition to vocabulary and listening, digital tools have shown potential in supporting grammar instruction. A study by Tu Thi Hong Phuong (2023) confirmed the efficacy of technological tools in enhancing students' grammar proficiency, particularly in online learning contexts. Furthermore, Yosafat Tabasi (2024) emphasized that technology-enhanced learning environments could boost engagement, personalize instruction, and provide access to authentic language and cultural content. Despite these

advantages, challenges remained, including unequal access to digital devices, unstable internet connections, and the need for more effective pedagogical integration of technology.

Although the benefits of using technology in language learning were well-documented, several gaps remained in the existing literature. First, few studies provided quantitative insights into how frequently students used specific technological tools (e.g., YouTube, online dictionaries, mobile apps) for English learning outside the classroom. Second, while many studies focused on the positive impacts of technology, there was limited attention to the practical barriers students face, such as poor connectivity, device limitations, and difficulty in selecting appropriate tools. Third, learner-centered perspectives on the role of technology in enhancing engagement, motivation, and skill development remain underexplored in real-world educational contexts.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing a data-driven and learner-focused examination of the use of technological tools in English language learning outside the classroom. Drawing on survey data from 400 second-year university students, the research will investigate: the frequency of technological tool usage in self-study and homework; the perceived benefits of using these tools and the barriers and challenges students encounter during the learning process.

As Nguyễn (2020) suggested, students were eager to apply mobile learning tools in learning a foreign language despite facing connectivity issues, yet a comprehensive analysis of these opportunities and challenges within a defined theoretical framework is still needed. Ultimately, the findings are intended to inform educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers about the best practices for technology-enhanced language instruction and provide guidance for more equitable and effective integration of digital tools in English language learning outside class.

To achieve these aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How often do students use technological tools to study English outside classrooms?

2. What are the levels of perceived benefits of using technological tools for studying English among students?

3. What are the barriers and challenges faced by students in utilizing technological tools for studying English outside the classroom?

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Research methodology

This study employed a quantitative and qualitative research design to systematically investigate students' perspectives on using technological tools for learning English outside the classroom. This approach was selected to collect and analyze numerical data that could accurately reflect trends, frequencies, and relationships among key variables, including tool usage frequency, perceived benefits, and encountered challenges.

The participants were 400 second-year students from the Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology (ICTU). A convenience sampling method was used during the second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The sample comprised students from various majors to ensure diverse representation, with a balanced distribution in terms of gender and age (ranging from 19-21 years old). While convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the studied context, it was practical for this exploratory study. The online questionnaire was distributed to all 400 targeted students, resulting in a 100% response rate, thereby mitigating concerns of non-response bias within this specific sample.

Data was collected through the online administration of the finalized questionnaire. This method facilitated easy access and participation, which was particularly appropriate given the research focus on technological literacy. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize patterns in tool usage, perceived benefits, and barriers. This descriptive approach provides a clear and foundational overview central to addressing the research questions. The detailed methodology supports replicability in similar educational settings, contributing to the overall reliability of the study's findings.

2.2. Results and discussion

2.2.1. The frequency of using technological tools to study English outside of English classrooms

This section presents findings on the frequency of use for various technological tools. The data, summarized in Table 1 below, shows distinct patterns of adoption among students.

Table 1: Frequency of Using Technological Tools for English Learning (N=400)

Tool Category	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Mobile Apps	12.9%	46.0%	29.2%	7.0%	4.9%
YouTube	12.6%	45.6%	33.4%	6.1%	2.3%
Online Dictionaries	7.9%	25.9%	41.8%	19.4%	4.9%
Social Media Groups	4.7%	18.0%	47.7%	18.7%	11.0%
Language Learning Websites	2.6%	12.4%	60.0%	20.6%	4.4%
Digital Flashcards	3.3%	5.6%	32.7%	27.1%	31.3%
Language Exchange Platforms	6.3%	22.9%	33.2%	19.6%	18.0%

Obviously, it is the fact that the dominance of Mobile Apps and YouTube (combined "Always" and "Frequent" use >58%) was a significant finding. This proved more than just align with general observations of mobile and video-based learning popularity (Wang & Vásquez, 2018); it revealed a fundamental shift towards on-demand, entertainment-integrated, and micro-learning practices**.**

Based on the connection to theory & cause analysis using the principles of Self-Directed Learning. These tools offered unparalleled autonomy (learners choose what, when, and where to watch), immediate feedback (through interactive apps and comprehension of video content), and personalization (algorithmically suggested

content). The high usage was driven by their seamless integration into daily life, low barrier to entry, and the engagement value of audiovisual content. This contrasted sharply with more structured tools. In addition to this, the prevalence of these tools signified a trend of "learning fragmentation" or micro-learning, where language acquisition happened in short, focused bursts rather than in dedicated, lengthy sessions. This had crucial implications for curriculum designers, suggesting that supplementary materials could be chunked into digestible, mobile-friendly formats.

While many studies highlighted the *potential* of diverse tools, this research quantified the clear preference hierarchy in a real-world context. It demonstrated that students naturally gravitated towards tools offering the highest combination of convenience, engagement, and immediacy, a nuanced insight that moved beyond simply listing available technologies.

Conversely, the infrequent use of Digital Flashcards and Language Exchange Platforms (high "Seldom" or "Never" use) is equally telling. This finding challenges the assumption that all promising technological tools are widely adopted. These tools often require higher self-regulation and motivation (Jones & Smith, 2020). Creating flashcards demands upfront effort, and engaging on language exchange platforms involves social risk and scheduling. This creates a higher "activation energy" compared to the passive consumption or simple interaction of apps and videos. The data suggests that without explicit integration or guidance, students may find these more powerful tools too daunting for casual use. This is a key novel finding of this study. It highlights a critical gap between pedagogical potential and practical adoption. While educators and researchers often advocate for these tools, this study provides empirical evidence that students are not using them independently, underscoring the need for structured scaffolding to bridge this adoption gap.

2.2.2. The students' perspectives about the benefits of using IT tools

The data on perceived benefits strongly validates the theoretical framework of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) and Self-Directed Learning from the learners' viewpoint.

It is obviously shown that 74.3% of students valued the autonomy to choose their own learning topics was a powerful empirical confirmation of the self-determination theory which demonstrated that technology successfully supported the fundamental psychological need for autonomy, which was a key driver of intrinsic motivation. This transformed technology from a simple medium into an empowerment tool**,** enabling a personalized learning journey that formal education often could not provide. Besides, the benefits related to flexibility (learning during free time or housework) indicate that

technology was effectively blurring the boundaries between formal and informal learning. This "anytime, anywhere" access can reduce the perceived burden of studying and foster more consistent, integrated language practice, which is crucial for long-term acquisition. On the other hand, this study provided robust, quantitative validation for benefits that were often discussed qualitatively. For instance, the 65.2% agreement on enhanced peer connection quantitatively affirms the role of technology in facilitating the social and collaborative dimensions of language learning, an aspect sometimes overlooked in studies focused on individual tool use.

2.2.3. The barriers and challenges

Despite the recognized benefits, students reported significant challenges, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Perceived Barriers to Using Technological Tools (N=400)*

Barrier	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Poor Internet Connection	4.9%	24.1%	34.6%	26.2%	10.3%
Device Quality/Capability	4.4%	23.4%	32.9%	30.8%	8.4%
Difficulty Choosing Tools	11.7%	33.2%	39.7%	9.1%	6.3%

From the Table 2 above, it is shown that the most prominent barrier was "Difficulty choosing tools" (44.9% agreeing). This finding added a sophisticated, modern layer to the understanding of barriers to educational technology. This was not a barrier of access, but a barrier of evaluation and decision-making. The saturated market of learning apps, coupled with a lack of curated guidance, leads to "choice overload" or decision paralysis. Students spend valuable cognitive energy and time *selecting* tools rather than *using* them for deep learning. While previous research like Tu Thi Hong Phuong (2023) rightly focused on infrastructural issues, this study identified and quantified a more subtle, cognitive barrier that was increasingly relevant in the digital age. It shifted the focus from "how to get access" to "how to navigate abundance effectively," which was a significant contribution to the literature.

In addition to this, issues with internet connectivity (29% affected) and device quality (27.8%) confirmed the existence of a digital divide. However, when combined with the primary barrier of tool selection, it created a "double disadvantage" for affected students: they not only struggled with access but were also less able to use their limited connectivity efficiently due to the confusion of choosing the right tool. This exacerbated educational inequality and was a critical insight for policymakers.

Obviously. the high percentage of neutral responses (32.9%-39.7%) was a noteworthy finding in itself. It may indicate that a large cohort of students lacked a frame of reference - they have not experienced a learning environment with seamless technology and thus accept these challenges as a "normal" part of the process. This latent complacency could be a hidden barrier to advocating for and adopting improved technological solutions, a nuanced point that merits further qualitative investigation.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that students use a wide range of technological tools to study English outside the classroom with varying frequencies. The most popular tools are mobile apps and YouTube. This indicates a generally positive trend in integrating technology into self-directed English learning, although the level of usage differs among individuals. In terms of perceived benefits, most students recognized the advantages of using technological tools, such as the flexibility to study during free time or while doing housework, the ability to connect with peers for collaborative learning, and the freedom to choose learning topics and skills. These benefits highlight students' appreciation for the convenience and personalization that IT tools offer. However, the study also reveals notable barriers that may hinder effective technology use. These include poor internet connectivity, limitations in the quality or capability of digital devices, and the most significantly difficulty of selecting appropriate apps or websites from the overwhelming number of options available. These findings suggest the need for better technological support, improved access to reliable devices and internet, and clearer guidance on effective language learning tools to enhance students' experiences and outcomes in using technology for English learning.

Recommendations

To strengthen students' independent English learning with technology, educators and institutions should follow coordinated actions. The following recommendations are proposed, prioritized from foundational to strategic:

- To address the primary challenge of tool overload, educators should create and disseminate a curated list of vetted, effective technological tools. This list should be categorized by skill focus (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, speaking) and include brief guides on how to use them effectively.

- Universities and policymakers should invest in improving internet connectivity on campus and consider establishing device-lending programs for students in need. Ensuring equitable access to reliable technology is a foundational step.

- Curriculum designers should incorporate modules on digital literacy and self-directed learning strategies into English courses. This will equip students with the skills to evaluate, select, and use technological tools effectively and critically.

By addressing these recommendations, educational stakeholders can create an environment that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the challenges of using technological tools for studying English outside the classroom. This, in turn, can enhance students' learning experiences and support their language acquisition goals. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper qualitative insights into student experiences and explore the comparative effectiveness of specific tools on language acquisition outcomes.

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QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN KHI SỬ DỤNG CÔNG CỤ CÔNG NGHỆ ĐỂ HỌC TIẾNG ANH NGOÀI LỚP HỌC

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Tóm tắt: *Bài viết này nghiên cứu cách sinh viên sử dụng các công cụ công nghệ để học tiếng Anh ngoài lớp học, với mục đích tìm hiểu về tần suất sử dụng, thách thức và lợi ích của công nghệ. Phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng được áp dụng, với dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bảng hỏi dành cho 400 sinh viên trong học kỳ IV năm học 2023–2024. Phân tích thống kê mô tả cho thấy phần lớn sinh viên thường xuyên sử dụng ứng dụng di động, YouTube, từ điển trực tuyến và các nhóm mạng xã hội để học tiếng Anh. Những công cụ này mang lại trải nghiệm học tập linh hoạt, cá nhân hóa, giúp người học tự điều chỉnh tiến độ, tương tác thời gian thực và tiếp cận nội dung xác thực. Tuy nhiên, sinh viên cũng gặp phải những trở ngại như kết nối Internet kém, thiết bị học tập chưa đáp ứng và khó khăn trong việc lựa chọn công cụ hiệu quả giữa vô vàn lựa chọn. Kết quả nghiên cứu cung cấp cho giáo viên và nhà thiết kế chương trình học hỗ trợ người học tốt hơn thông qua việc nâng cao năng lực số, cải thiện điều kiện truy cập công nghệ và định hướng sử dụng công cụ phù hợp, góp phần xây dựng chiến lược dạy học tiếng Anh tích hợp công nghệ hiệu quả hơn. Nghiên cứu tiếp theo, tác giả sẽ thử nghiệm sinh viên sử dụng các công cụ công nghệ để học tiếng Anh trong lớp học và mở rộng đối tượng nghiên cứu.*

Từ khoá*: công cụ công nghệ, tiếng Anh, ngoài lớp học, sinh viên, quan điểm.*

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