

The Impact of Online Resources via Personal Devices on English-Majored Students' Learning Practices

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 <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24346>

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Received: 04/10/2024

Revision: 25/11/2024

Accepted: 27/11/2024

Online: 29/11/2024

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Online resources, personal technological devices, reading practice, perception, effects/impacts

This study examines the role of online resources accessed through personal technological devices in the learning practice of English-majored students. Eighty students were involved in this investigation; the author used a qualitative approach to analyze students' weekly news reports and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the students have consistently used their smartphones and laptops for reading practice due to their leveled news content. Students perceived this practice positively, acknowledging its benefits for learning vocabulary, developing reading skills, and enhancing background knowledge. They reported improved vocabulary acquisition through word family and collocation learning, enhanced reading speed through skimming, and increased knowledge of current affairs. The study highlights the advantages of this practice, such as portability, convenience, and resource availability, while acknowledging minor drawbacks like note-taking difficulties. Other recommendations are class discussions, bonus marks to motivate the students, discipline, reading of specific topics, and construction of online learning platforms. Generally, this paper indicates that online resources and PTDs shall be helpful in enhancing the actual practice of reading in English-majored students.

Introduction

Rapid technological evolution and overall access to the Internet brought great changes in education, especially in EFL learning. In modern times, personal technological devices like smartphones and laptops have been part of every individual's life, allowing for unparalleled access to language learning beyond a traditional classroom setting.

This paper discusses profound changes functioned by the integration of online resources (voanews.com, english.vietnamnet.vn, bbc.com/news, foxnews.com, tuoitrenews.vn, etc.), particularly online news platforms through PTDs on the reading practice of English-majored students at a university in Central Vietnam where English language education has grown in

importance, despite the fact that greater class sizes and a lack of resources frequently make it difficult to teach the language effectively. Although traditional methods have been the mainstay of English education in the past, there has been a steady change in recent years towards the integration of internet resources to improve students' vocabulary, listening comprehension, and exposure to different cultures. Based on a qualitative approach, this research explores how this innovative approach influences students' learning of vocabulary, developing reading skills, and acquiring background knowledge. The study analyzed the weekly news reports submitted by first-year students enrolled in one language course, complemented by in-depth interviews with them to understand their perceptions and experiences. By closely examining how the students use online resources (i.e. British Council: Learn English, BBC Learning English, and DyNED) on their PTDs, this paper attempts to highlight the pros and cons and the general effect that the practice has on EFL reading comprehension. The findings will be of importance in giving insights into how the transformative potential of technology for improving language learning outcomes can be harnessed by learners and educators alike.

Literature Review

M-learning

In the 21st century, students have become so integrated with the online world that they can only ever be imagined with a mobile device in their hands. Dwivedi et al. (2021) explain that among a set of devices, mobile technologies include varieties such as mobile phones, electronic dictionaries, PDAs, and tablet computers. These devices have recently been considered effective tools for developing educational practices since they allow unique functionalities for learning. According to Zang and Shen (2024), m-learning is a new learning model that enables learners to access any learning material at any time and from any location, thus depending on wireless networks and the Internet. Tools that support m-learning are basically all types of mobile technologies applied to laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Quan et al. (2024) describe m-learning as an idea where learners are not constrained to one place and thus can exploit some learning opportunities afforded by portable technologies. This mode of learning is characterized by spontaneity, personalization, informality, contextual relevance, portability, and ubiquity. With these features, the application of m-learning has been greatly utilized in educational settings and some instructors have even called for the inclusion of mobile phones in pedagogy as well (Nguyễn Văn Long & Nguyễn Nữ Thùy Uyên, 2021; Ngo & Doan, 2023).

Extensive and intensive reading approaches

Sun (2023) recommends that for optimal reading benefit, students should do some extensive and intensive reading. The former allows students to choose texts for pleasure and language improvement, while the latter is teacher-directed reading to develop certain receptive skills. Online resources support this dual approach by promoting comprehension of the content in written form, which allows communication across time and distance (Alobaid, 2020). The essence of reading encompasses the capability of the reader to make meaning out of texts using interpretive and critical thinking. The schemata theory itself points to the necessity of background knowledge. This interplay between linguistic knowledge and world knowledge is

essential for successful reading. It is reinforced by Kaefer (2020), who expresses that reading is not totally a visual activity but relies mostly on the readers' prior knowledge and experience. Özgür Küfi (2023) then distinguishes between content schemata, which concern knowledge about people, cultures, and concepts, and formal schemata, or knowledge about discourse structure. The understanding herein presumes the importance of extensive reading; hence, it is a practice that advances linguistic competence and vocabulary and is also important to comprehensive reading ability development. The different genres of the written texts, as posited by Özgür Küfi (2023), inform the expectations and purposes of the readers, which again direct their choices for short- and long-term retention.

Strategies for vocabulary and reading comprehension development

The suggested strategies draw on bottom-up and top-down processes following Özgür Küfi (2023) and involve identifying reading purposes, phonemic rules, skimming to get the main idea, and semantic mapping techniques.

The "SQ3R" sequence is one effective method for deeply engaging with a body of text, as it entails surveying, questioning, reading, reciting, and reviewing (Nabilla & Asmara, 2022). Vocabulary acquisition is also a fundamental process in language learning, serving as the bridge between the four core language skills (Kazu & Kuvvetli, 2023; Thach, 2022). According to Zhang (2022), there is listening comprehension and fluency with proper vocabulary knowledge. Effective vocabulary instruction should combine explicit teaching with incidental learning, as Sok and Han (2020) propose, by allowing the learners to encounter new vocabulary in various contexts. Zhang (2022) added that aside from receptive and productive vocabulary, although receptive skills involve recognizing and recalling word meanings, productive skills regard active use of those words in speech or writing. Ultimately, vocabulary provides the grounds for a realistic base in effective language learning since it allows learners to understand and be understood. Finally, even though the significance of the use of the target language is acknowledged in language learning and teaching, learners' L1 also plays an important role, especially for young EFL learners.

Wijnands et al. (2021) maintain that L1 facilitates learning since the student can express his ideas clearly and understand new vocabulary and grammatical structures more appropriately. According to Nazari et al. (2023), the basic roles of L1 in the classroom are instructional, managerial, and affective. Indeed, research has shown that using L1 while learning new vocabulary can help learners retain and learn the items better, especially at lower levels of proficiency. Hence, a balanced approach that uses both L1 and L2 strategies is going to optimize vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do English-major students utilize online resources for reading practice?
2. What are the perceptions of these students regarding the use of online resources?
3. What impact does the use of online resources have on these English majors?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study has adopted a qualitative research design since Indhiarti and Sudarwati (2021) observed that the strength of qualitative data lies in its ability to focus on real ordinary events in natural settings. The method allows data collection in proximity to the event(s) of interest; this has been of great assistance in obtaining a better understanding of events over a considerable period. As such, the findings from the students' weekly reports and semi-structured interviews were organized into descriptive interpretations of the case under study, rather than in merely numerical format.

The research was carried out at a university in Central Vietnam, which annually recruits about 1,000 new undergraduates. In such circumstances, classes are usually quite large; most courses for all four skills have between 35 and 45 students in one class. The total number of the focus group replied to 80 students (69 female and 11 male) enrolled in "English B1.2" course when they were between 17-19 years old. The participants are at a lower intermediate level of English proficiency. The students at this level can generally handle routine tasks related to familiar topics in English but are still struggling with using more complicated or abstract language.

Data collection methods

Data collection included the students' weekly reports and semi-structured interviews. In the two "English B1.2" classes, students were required to engage with weekly readings from different news, about which they reported in a format that was provided. Due to flexible dialog, semi-structured interviews allowed for more in-depth information about the experiences and practices of the students out of the classroom setting. The interviews were conducted both in English and Vietnamese, catering to the differential proficiency levels of the participants, and included questions designed to probe the content of their weekly reports.

Data analysis methodologies

Two qualitative sets of data, namely students' reports, and interview data, were analyzed. These are labeled from S1 to S80 for efficient management. Thematic analysis, informed by Caskurlu et al. (2021), was de rigueur and followed several steps: familiarization with the data, development of a coding framework based on the content of data, and theoretical insights that had been developed. Coding reliability was also checked by a colleague with extensive experience, reaching an inter-coder reliability index of 89.3%. Further steps included identifying and refining the themes, selecting representative excerpts, and synpapering the findings into a coherent report. Students' voices were represented accurately in all parts of the analysis.

Results/Findings

How do English-major students utilize online resources for reading practice?

The researcher pointed out several online reading practice sources at the beginning of the semester, encouraging students to access them with the use of personal technological devices.

At the end of the course, students summarized their reading experiences in final reports. The most visited sites for this purpose are British Council: Learn English, BBC Learning English, and DyNED, where news items are presented at three levels of proficiency, and students can select texts according to their current level of English. Indeed, this feature was especially welcomed by many respondents. Thus, S11 reported reading at Level 1 first because she found other texts too difficult, whereas S13 said that switching between levels helped her enhance her reading skills. Similarly, S21, who comes from a remote area where there is limited access to English learning materials, thanked these resources that allowed her to practice reading effectively.

A related finding was that the students independently searched for other resources besides what was suggested by the teacher-researcher. The use of websites offering bookmarking services became one of the strategies for accessing convenience to news. S28 reported saving links and browsing through the news during discretionary moments; S21 reported convenience in the reception of automatic news updates via the BBC app. Another important source of news was Facebook. S55 explained: "By subscribing to various pertinent pages, the feed will offer a constant flow of articles, including those shared by friends."

Regarding the devices, students preferred smartphones and laptops for carrying out reading practice. Some students preferred mobile devices as they are portable and 'Wi-Fi is available' anytime. For example, S21 said that her smartphone enabled her to read news anytime and anywhere. Other participants shared the same opinion. Overall, a set of resources recommended by teachers with the emergence of mobile apps and social network sites supported students' at-home reading practices.

What are the perceptions of these students regarding the use of online resources?

In the "English B1.2" course, 80 English-majored students were assigned a weekly news report as part of their formative assessment, which accounted for 30% of the students' evaluation. Students are encouraged to read news articles outside of the classroom and submit one report every week uploaded onto the class's LMS account. The teacher-researcher analyzed data over this semester and noted several key findings:

The number of submitted reports varied considerably. More than half of the participants submitted 9 or 10 reports, the highest number expected to submit for this course. About 95% of the students were on time, submitting their report on time, monitored through the history feature of LMS. The rest, 5%, were usually one day late but because of usually acceptable reasons. The PTDs were used not only to access news articles but also to submit and report the analysis. It is also an added value when S42 identified that sending and reading reports on the smartphone facilitates the reporting activity with much ease.

However, more than 10% submitted less than five, suggesting that not all students found this reading practice to be as useful as others. This could be a point for further investigation into these differences in the perception of using online resources among students, and the discussion of reasons for this will be continued later on in the report.

What impact does the use of online resources have on these English majors?

In the experiment, students used different online resources to enhance their reading practice, mainly in vocabulary acquisition, reading ability, and background knowledge.

Vocabulary learning: The students learned word families to understand word forms and to develop their skills in using words in various contexts. S21 reported that learning the word families helped in writing, especially in understanding word placement in sentences in English. In addition, participants also used new words in sentences to improve their receptive and productive skills. S19 reported that the practice of new vocabulary improved the retention and performance of other language tasks such as listening. This was the opportunity to learn about collocations for many students, who realized how words combine in particular contexts. Several learners favored translation as their strategy for comprehension of vocabulary because, with the use of a bilingual dictionary, learning new words was easier.

Reading skills: The "3Rs" approach, reading, reciting, and reviewing as a practice of reading news articles, helped students increase their reading speed and improve comprehension. For instance, S66 reported that she could read more quickly and paraphrase the piece of news after reading it effectively. Other students also liked to read longer articles and enjoyed doing extensive reading, especially with the flexibility provided by PTDs, thus allowing them to read news from different genres.

General knowledge: Students reported that reading online news extended their general knowledge. S46 continued to say that news items brought them in contact with aspects of the world they were unfamiliar with, which was useful at university and significant for their future professions.

In general, online resources have been found to impact positively on vocabulary, reading skills, and broader knowledge building.

Specific suggestions that participants have to improve the use of online resources for reading include class and group discussions to share viewpoints, teacher-led news analysis, and giving bonus marks to encourage the best reports. They suggested discipline in submission could be developed through reading weekly topics to build engagement and collaborative learning. The teacher-researcher suggested that online interaction could be sustained through online interaction tools such as Facebook and Edmodo for discussions and the sharing of news. With the consideration of the time factor, it was recommended that peer review complement the teacher's marking of the weekly report. Besides, strict discipline with timely feedback should be undertaken to improve reading practice with online resources on personal devices.

Conclusion

The reading practices of the participants in this study were regular, using PTDs like smartphones and laptops, supplemented by mobile apps and Wi-Fi. Their favorite resources were British Council: Learn English and DyNED because they offered texts according to the learners' English proficiency level. Evidence from data analysis also suggests that the integration of online resources significantly enhanced learners' development in three key areas:

vocabulary acquisition, reading fluency, and contextual understanding. While participants suggested group discussions, reading tasks on a weekly basis, and bonus marks as motivations, teachers suggested ideas such as using online tools within the classroom and online platforms. These would include implications for educators: motivating learners to continue reading with the support of PTDs, providing ample reading, and promoting collaborative learning. The limitations of the study included the lack of control groups, problems in paraphrasing tasks for students with lower proficiency, and challenges in qualitative data management. These challenges do give motivation for future studies, though. Other recommendations for future research include matching experimental and control groups, reworking the design of tasks to cover more skills, and exploring the impact of online resources on additional language skills. Such results and recommendations may support further and more in-depth research into the use of PTDs during language learning.

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Biodata

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Van Long serves as the Vice-Rector at the University of Danang - University of Foreign Languages Studies, having held the position of lecturer since the late 1990s. His recent engagements include active involvement in multiple initiatives within the National Foreign Languages Project, assuming roles as a Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) specialist and serving as the vice-president of VietCALL. Long earned his Master of Arts in TESOL Studies from the University of Queensland in 2005, followed by a PhD in Applied Linguistics, with a focus on Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), from Massey University. Recognized as a Microsoft MIE (Microsoft Innovative Educator) and PIL (Professional in Learning), he has been acknowledged since 2012. He has received several prestigious grants for his noteworthy contributions to research endeavors. His extensive

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