Chapter 12

EFL Learners' Digitalized Practices in Promoting Vocabulary Learning at the Higher Education Level

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ABSTRACT

Technology has become an integral part of education; and language instruction, which is communicative in nature, has a share in the whole unit. The widespread use of portable devices has also transformed language learning through diverse accessible facilities that can alternatively be evaluated in an out-of-school context. This paved the way for self-directed learning practices that enable learners to advance their language skills and vocabulary. This study aimed to investigate these self-directed practices for learning vocabulary in English. 120 EFL learners at diverse departments at a state university in Turkiye participated in the study. For data collection, a survey was employed that interrogated the self-directed vocabulary learning practices of the participants in digital contexts. The results of the study showed that learners use mobile technology for English language practices and adopt different strategies in vocabulary learning supplied by a variety of digital applications and facilities. The results are discussed and related implications are addressed based on the findings.

INTRODUCTION

The tendency to remote learning has been prevalent among learners with the expansion of online education facilities. The incorporation of digital tools and resources that have been designed for specific purposes in education has also become widespread for more efficient learning and teaching outcomes (González-Lloret, 2017). An increase in the use of technology for self-directed learning was documented in the previous years (Plews, 2017), yet the integration of remote learning has peaked specifically after the COVID-19 pandemic (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020). Hence, it became significant to examine the self-directed practices of learners and also teachers for a better understanding and evaluation of the practices. Within this respect, technology-mediated learning and teaching are at the center of remote learning on behalf of both learners and teachers (Sung et al., 2015). Within this scope, language instruction also benefits from the opportunities provided by computer-assisted or mobile-assisted learning practices. In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the significance of learner strategies that direct individual learning practices in the mastery of a target language. According to Oxford (2011), selected among alternatives by the learners, these self-directed strategies are "deliberate goal-directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn the L2" (p. 12). Referring to this situation, the importance of learner-initiated practices is recognized, and this caused a need for the discovery of these practices that are commonly conducted in out-of-class contexts (Lai et al., 2022). Effective strategies in self-directed foreign language learning may guide other learners who want to follow autonomous tracks in learning. Furthermore, it is essential for language teachers to guide learners at the higher education level for self-directed learning practices through digital tools (Kimsesiz, 2023). As suggested by Xodabande and Atai (2022), receptive and productive vocabulary development through digital tools should be focused. According to Çetin Köroğlu et al. (2022), as online learning has a direct connection with autonomy, self-directed learning is essential for learners "to have agency in their own learning actions as well as for an effective language learning process and progress" (p. 103). Hence, the investigation of these strategies is essential to provide alternatives to foreign language learners and to understand the most applicable and efficient ways of learning. For these reasons, this study aimed to investigate the self-directed vocabulary learning practices of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners at the higher education level through computer-assisted learning facilities. The research questions that motivated the study are:

1- What is the level of EFL learners' access to and preference for digital devices, digital programs, and translation programs?
2- Which digital platforms do EFL learners use for vocabulary learning?

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