

STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES PRACTICING DIGITAL LITERACY USING YOUTUBE AS AN ENGLISH LEARNING TOOL

Aprilia Dyah Kriswinahyu¹, Fidelis Chosa Kastuhandani^{*)}²

¹Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; apriliadyah.krswnhyu22@gmail.com

²Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; chosakh@usd.ac.id

^{*)}Corresponding author; E-mail addresses: chosakh@usd.ac.id

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Abstract. Technology integration transformed English learning, innovating tools and platforms that change educational dynamics. Among various digital platforms, YouTube emerges as a versatile global resource with extensive content for English learning. However, simply providing access to YouTube does not guarantee effective, safe use or learning. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of students in the English Language Education Study Program at Sanata Dharma University using YouTube to learn English. Students' lived experiences shown through their beliefs, feelings, actions, and decision-making on YouTube. This research examined how students practice digital literacy while learning English on YouTube and how these practices give meaning to their learning. Findings revealed experiences like evaluating video trustworthiness, collaborating with fellow YouTubers, creating videos, addressing safety and privacy concerns, and applying videos

creatively for personalized language goals significantly impacted their learning. Students expressed positive attitudes about these digital literacy practices, emphasizing the benefits of self-paced access to authentic English resources. This study provides insight into how students leverage digital platforms like YouTube for language learning through critical digital literacy practices. The findings suggest implications for educators seeking to train students in determining credible information for learning through digital platforms, as this issue gained substantial participants' attention.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is influential and vital in people's daily lives in this rapidly digitalized era. In particular, this digital revolution has greatly influenced English language learning. The digital revolution, with a stronger focus on using digital tools and resources, has changed how English language is taught and learned (I. De Florio-Hansen, 2021). Digitalization is unavoidable. Excluding digital platforms from educational settings is irresponsible for the next generation (I. De Florio-Hansen, 2021). The learning process is no longer restricted to the classroom setting. Therefore, students are expected to use digital tools to enhance their learning achievements. Access to language resources and learning has been significantly transformed by the quick growth of the internet and digital technologies (Zeng, 2023). Nowadays students are presented with new opportunities to practice their language abilities,

discover authentic learning materials, and improve their language ability all at once due to the growth of digital tools and platforms. Digital learning tools and technology contribute significantly and even efficiently to English learning (Citrawati et al., 2021).

Moreover, there are several benefits to learning using digital tools, including improving students' ability to use technology, accommodating a variety of learning preferences, and expanding their knowledge and insights (Arono et al., 2021). Digital platforms can facilitate communication and collaboration, share information, and make learning more dynamic and student-centered (D. Florio-Hansen, 2018). With the advantages and benefits offered, students are expected to make digital tools an option to optimize the language learning process.

Among the many digital tools available, YouTube is a versatile global platform with an extensive selection of appropriate content for English learning purposes. YouTube was first founded in 2005 by three former PayPal employees. As one of the most popular video-sharing platforms on the internet (Nofrika, 2019), YouTube has even emerged as one of the most significant perspectives for English education (Ogirima et al., 2021). This is because YouTube is seen as a beneficial, supportive, and effective learning tool for students to learn English (Aprianto, 2023). The digital content on YouTube is presented in the form of videos. *Video* is a potentially helpful audio-visual medium to assist teaching and learning activities with learners' comprehension and retention abilities in the learning process (Onivehu Adams et al., 2018). Video provides students with real-world examples and demonstrations that can enhance students' understanding of the material.

YouTube offers many educational videos for students at all skill levels (Nasution, 2019). Examples of videos offered on YouTube include animated input videos, filmmaker videos, participatory videos, and student presentations (Onivehu Adams et al., 2018). Therefore, YouTube can be utilized in English learning to improve language acquisition since it offers interactive learning through visual and auditory inputs and examples of language use in context. The visual and auditory elements of videos can enhance students' comprehension and retention of information (Jailani, 2022). Students can utilize several interactive features on YouTube, such as watching, downloading, uploading, commenting on, liking or disliking, and sharing videos. These features help to explain why YouTube gain significant students' attention for its potential as a learning tool. More than that, YouTube offers flexibility to language learners. Students can access a wide range of educational content on YouTube whenever and wherever they want (Jailani, 2022).

While YouTube offers the flexibility of a vast collection of learning videos and resources, providing access does not guarantee effective learning. This is because effective technology integration in learning depends not only on access but also on the learners' attitudes, actions, and beliefs toward it (Blau et al., 2020). Moreover, the flexibility offered extends to different aspects of learning, such as time, place, learning style, learning resources, and even assessment, which guides students to become more self-reliant and independent learners (Fadhilah et al., 2020). To fully benefit from the facilities YouTube provides, students need to be digitally literate to deal with them in the English learning setting.

Digital literacy has become a critical skill in the 21st century. With the ongoing evolution of technology and its increasing integration into people daily lives, the definition and

meaning of digital literacy have also changed. "Digital literacy" is a term that is frequently invoked but rarely defined consistently (Guess & Munger, 2021). The skills and competencies that build digital literacy evolve with technological advancements and everyday interactions.

UNESCO in 2018 proposed a more career-focused definition of digital literacy through a comprehensive approach outlined in "*A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2*". Digital literacy is someone's ability to use digital technologies for reliable and appropriate information creation, management, comprehension, integration, communication, and evaluation for employment, reputable careers, and entrepreneurship. Digital literacy covers competencies that are referred to computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy, and media literacy (Law et al., 2018)

Digital literacy equips students with the competency to effectively search, evaluate, and utilize digital content. Digital literacy empowers students to take charge of their learning process by allowing them to participate fully in digital spaces (Park et al., 2017). The ability of digital spaces to use search engines effectively goes beyond just knowing how to use them. It also includes critically evaluating online sources for relevance and reliability as it is a critical skill for academic research and language learning. This is because the increasing use of digital platforms brings positive and negative impacts on students (Armanda & Yosintha, 2022). On the positive side, digital information resources have expanded enormously due to developments in information technology and the Internet, which simplify the process for people to produce, distribute, and access information (Kurnianingsih et al., 2017). As a result, students today can acquire information easily and quickly and communicate easily with others. On the negative side, not all online information is valuable or reliable (Mega, 2020). Students now have access to an enormous amount of digital information because of advancements in technology like the web and databases (Kurnianingsih et al., 2017).

Numerous studies have emphasized the increasing importance of digital literacy in facilitating the efficient use of technologies for language learning. As our world becomes more digitally connected, language learners should acquire digital literacy competencies and strategies to optimize the benefits of digital technology for language learning as it is significant to their readiness for the opportunities and challenges that modern education presents (Abutalebi & Clahsen, 2022; Blau et al., 2020). Developing digital literacy can significantly impact language learning in several ways. First, digitally literate students can access diverse online resources, tools, and platforms that can motivate and engage them beyond physical textbooks (Armanda & Yosintha, 2022). Second, it enables critical evaluation of internet sources, a key ability for determining reliable language learning materials (Rahman et al., 2023). In addition, digital literacy empowers language learners to become content creators and communicators in the digital age. This competency is important for conveying ideas and improving language fluency (Blau et al., 2020). Finally, digital literacy facilitates cross-cultural communication by allowing participation in online communities and social media to interact with native speakers and students from diverse backgrounds (Rahman et al., 2023).

The question on how students practice digital literacy as a necessity to support their English learning on digital tools and platforms in the setting of Indonesian higher education has

not received much attention, particularly when looking at it from students' lived experiences that are presented qualitatively. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the lived experiences of Indonesian university students using YouTube to learn English and how they employ digital literacy during that learning process. Gaining insights into students' beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, and intentions through their lived experiences will make clear the meaning they make of these learning experiences. The findings can guide efforts to promote effective technology integration and the development of digital literacy competencies among students.

This study offers two contributions to the English education field. Initially, this study aims to broaden the relatively small group of qualitative studies on practicing digital literacy, specifically using YouTube as an English learning tool among English language learners in Indonesian higher education. Second, this study highlights the importance of introducing learners to digital literacy in a way that equips them for effective self-directed online learning. The findings can improve educators' preparation programs and educational initiatives incorporating digital literacy and technology education into the English curriculum. Giving students these essential abilities for using and navigating platforms such as YouTube can better prepare them for learning English in the digital age.

METHOD

Research Method

This research applied a qualitative method using a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences practicing digital literacy using YouTube as an English learning tool. Lived experiences are everyday experiences that refer to people's immediate consciousness and give meaning to their lives as they are subjective experiences (Manen, 1997). Lived experiences are considered an essential data source for this research, as they provide first-hand, subjective insights into a phenomenon from those who experience it. The goal of phenomenology is to convert lived experience into a textual representation that captures its essence so that the reader can experience what is written as a reflective reliving of that experience and a reflective appropriation of something significant.

Research Design

This research utilized phenomenology to uncover the essence of students' lived experiences practicing digital literacy through YouTube for English learning. The data collection and analysis will incorporate digital literacy indicators of UNESCO's (2018) Digital Literacy Global Framework (DLGF) to give a comprehensive perspective for analyzing students' lived experiences practicing digital literacy using YouTube as an English learning tool. The DLGF defined seven important competency areas for digital literacy, which includes information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, problem-solving, devices and software operations, and career-related competencies. Multiple indicators for each competency area show the competencies in use (**Table 1**). Each competency area was mapped to relevant competencies involved in using YouTube for English learning to integrate this framework. In this study, the DLGF served as the foundation for the development of questions that were given to participants via questionnaires and interviews. Each competency area was the basis for creating questions tailored to the digital literacy competency indicators that this framework expected to put into practice. Aligning the study with this globally acknowledged UNESCO standard adds credibility to the results, making them more relevant and applicable to various educational contexts.

Table 1. Competency Areas and Competency Indicators of Digital Literacy proposed by UNESCO in 2018

Competency Areas	Competency Indicators
1. Foundations of Hardware and Software	1.1 Turning on/ off and charging, locking devices 1.2 Managing user account and password
2. Information and literacy data	2.1 Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content 2.2 Evaluating data, information and digital content 2.3 Managing data, information and digital content
3. Communication and collaboration	3.1 Interacting through digital technologies 3.2 Sharing through digital technologies 3.3 Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies 3.4 Collaborating through digital technologies 3.5 Netiquette 3.6 Managing digital identity
4. Digital content creation	4.1 Developing digital content 4.2 Integrating and re-elaborating digital content 4.3 Copyright and licenses 4.4 Programming
5. Safety	5.1 Protecting devices 5.2 Protecting personal data and privacy 5.3 Protecting health and well being 5.4 Protecting the environment
6. Problem solving	6.1 Solving technical problems 6.2 Identifying needs and technological responses 6.3 Creatively using digital technologies 6.4 Identifying digital competence gaps
7. Career-related competences	7.1 Operating specialized hardware/ software for a particular field

Participants

The study participants were five students of the English Language Education Study Program at Sanata Dharma University. The participants were in their 7th semester when this research was conducted. This research used criterion sampling to collect participants. The researcher decided what information was necessary and sought participants willing to supply the information needed. These criteria were determined by the nature of the study's goals. The participants for this research study must be enrolled in an English Education study program. Their engagement with YouTube to learn English must be proven by having a YouTube account, watching YouTube videos for English learning at least once a week, and subscribing to a channel created for learning English. Most importantly, participants eligible for this study must have direct experience in creating English learning resources on YouTube, having created and uploaded at least two original YouTube videos aimed at learning English. These critical criteria will ensure that the participants have first-hand experience as both consumers and creators in the English learning landscape on YouTube.

Data Gathering Method

In line with the phenomenological approach, data was primarily gathered through in-depth,

semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. To gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the phenomenon under study, open-ended questions enable the exploration of new ideas and themes that the researcher may not have previously considered (Neubauer et al., 2019). The interview protocol consisted of several open-ended questions to elicit rich, detailed descriptions of the students' lived experiences practicing digital literacy while learning English through YouTube. Individual interviews lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. To ensure that participant narratives were accurately captured, audio recordings of interviews were made with permission and afterward verbatim transcribed.

The participants filled out an open-ended written questionnaire before the interview. The questionnaire included ten open-ended questions that complemented the interview questions. The questionnaire questions were created in line with the competency areas of digital literacy as proposed in the Digital Literacy Global Framework. Firstly, the researcher reviewed UNESCO's Global Framework for Digital Literacy, noting the key competencies and literacies it proposed. The researcher then narrowed the focus to the most relevant competencies in using YouTube effectively for English language learning, such as finding and evaluating online information, creating digital content, engaging with online communities, and managing digital identity and reputation. With these competencies in mind, the researcher aimed to construct open-ended questions that could shed light on students' lived experiences and their perceived level of ability about these competencies. Due to the questionnaires, participants had additional time and flexibility to express experiences they might need to include during the interview.

These complementary open-ended methods of data collection enabled triangulation. Triangulation involves using data sources to gain a thorough understanding of a phenomenon to check the validity of findings by looking for agreement between different sources of information (Carter et al., 2014). They produced comprehensive, descriptive explorations on how students see the phenomenon of employing digital literacy in using YouTube to learn English.

Data Analysis Method

Accurate recordings of each participant's experience were ensured using verbatim transcription of the interviews. To minimize subjective bias, the researcher employed bracketing to set aside assumptions. Bracketing is a technique employed in transcendental phenomenological research where the researcher attempts to set aside their preassumptions about a topic to prevent the researcher's subjective viewpoints from influencing the data analysis (Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher conducted member checking by asking participants to check the interview transcripts. Feedback from the participants helped limit the researcher's subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the researcher read the transcripts several times to become fully immersed in the information as essential points pertinent to the study phenomenon regarding the digital literacy practices using YouTube for English learning were underlined. After extracting these insightful statements, the researcher organized them into themes that began to appear across the data. Themes stand for the central ideas of the encounter. The researcher combined the main ideas of each participant into a personalized textural description that summed up their distinct experience. In addition, the researcher produced a composite textural description that reflected the group of individuals as a whole.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students Cultivate Their Critical Thinking in Discerning the Trustworthiness of Content

When it comes to finding videos for learning English on YouTube, the participants stressed the importance of the first step which was setting specific learning goals before searching the videos. Goal-setting is a part of the planning process which has significance since it gives students practice controlling their online learning (Fadhilah et al., 2020). It was done to control the quantity of available YouTube videos. In addition, typing specific keywords was employed by participants to discover and locate videos aligned with their learning needs or preferences. Using specific keywords helps narrow search results and facilitates the discovery of relevant videos. Search engine optimization (SEO) relies strongly on keywords, which are also important for increasing the visibility of online content (Law et al., 2018).

"First, I had to make sure, like, I went to YouTube to see how to teach persuasive text. I definitely set the goal first." – Participant 5

"The first thing to do was know what I wanted to search for. If I just typed the keyword randomly, managing the number of videos would be difficult. By knowing the goal, I would find the video more quickly, and it would be following my preferences." – Participant 2

Participants began evaluating the YouTube channel and videos' reputation once YouTube presented them with videos matching their typed keywords. They considered the number of viewers, comments, and subscribers the channel that uploaded the video had. Participants believed that videos uploaded by educational institutions or channels, for example, BBC Learning English generally contained reliable information supporting their English learning. Participants' belief refers to the credibility of the source which is one dimension for evaluating social media information. Source credibility refers to the credibility of people or organizations that publish and distribute information, such as government agencies, academic institutions, and industry experts (Sun, 2021). In this context, participants emphasized trust in the educational institution that released the information. Educational institution videos are produced by experts, like professors or researchers, who understand the subject. Videos published by educational institutions were frequently subjected to peer review and accuracy checks, which added to their trustworthiness (Vaganova et al., 2019).

"I usually looked at the viewers, comments, or the subscribers. So, I can see whether it is a credible and trusted video or not." - Participant 3

"The more subscribers a channel has, the more it shows that it is trusted by many people." – Participant 1

Some participants also preferred native speakers for the videos they would use to learn English. Participants believed that native English speakers possess a deeper understanding of the language than non-native English speakers. Native English-speaking teachers tend to be preferred by students due to their spoken language proficiency and knowledge of social values (Qadeer, 2019). Furthermore, hearing the language from native speakers increases students' exposure to it in its natural speech, which can improve their understanding and fluency (Ningsih, 2017)

"I usually tried to find native speakers because I did not think native speakers were like us. Native speakers were born already speaking English, so they already got into it. I think they have more knowledge about learning English compared to us who only learned it from childhood, not from birth." – Participant 5

Students Produce and Upload Digital Content Aligned with Their Personalized Learning Goals

Every research participant had prior experience making and uploading English language learning videos on YouTube. Creating videos for educational content lays under the learning-by-design approach. Students actively engaged in the making of learning materials, such as videos, where in this process they worked in teams to write storyboards, research relevant materials, and create their own videos (Buchner, 2018). The video creation was done individually, in pairs, or in groups. As the students of the English Language Education study program, participants were frequently given assignments by the lecturers to make YouTube videos with a particular English topic. Participants went through several steps to create a video with excellent visuals and content. The first step participants did to prepare an English learning video was writing a script. Participants researched the topic that would be discussed first on the Internet to make sure the material in the video was presented correctly. As references for the subject matter covered in the video, participants reviewed the lecturer's materials and articles from journals.

"In preparing the script, I first researched using materials from lecturers or from journals that are trusted." – Participant 4

The script was usually memorized in its entirety or through its essential points. In addition, the video-taking process was often done repeatedly to get the best raw video results. Participants shot videos in segments corresponding to specified parts to make it easier to memorize the script. These parts would later be combined during video editing.

Participants also edited the videos before uploading them on YouTube. The goals of this video editing were high audio quality and more captivating audio-visuals to draw viewers' attention. Students used several other video editing programs, including Canva and CapCut, to add transitions, voiceovers, sound effects, and presentation slide content to their videos. Combining visualizations with spoken text can maximize student learning from the video by keeping the attention of the learners during the video (Buchner, 2018). Furthermore, participants reviewed the videos before they were uploaded to YouTube. This step attempted to give a final check of its content and audio-visual aspects. Another primary goal of this step was to keep the audience from being misled by inaccurate information in the video.

"I usually made presentations using Canva to make the video more interesting. After that, I edited the video again using CapCut. I added transitions, voiceovers, and other details." – Participant 5

Every participant used YouTube as an English learning tool differently, based on their specific needs and creative abilities. Participants used YouTube to create videos for their own English learning. Participants identified what their needs in learning English that needed to be fulfilled and considered YouTube as a potential solution. This process involved participants' problem-solving skills to solve conceptual problems. Problem-solving in the context of digital literacy involves the ability to identify needs and problems to innovate processes and products that keep pace with digital evolution (Law et al., 2018).

"I often made and uploaded videos to YouTube for myself regarding the summary of what I learned after online learning. For example, after the school management course, I made a 5-minute video of what I learned that day." - Participant 1

In addition to making videos for independent learning purposes, students also utilized YouTube to produce videos useful for other YouTube users, especially for English learning purposes. The uploaded videos were intentionally as engaging and creative as possible to attract viewers to watch them.

"I once uploaded a video about my idol for a speaking course to YouTube, which I created as informative as possible to engage the viewers. I gave much information and edited it as interestingly as possible so that it could be useful and beneficial for people who watch it, especially for those who are learning English." – Participant 2

Students are Aware of Their YouTube Accounts and Devices Security

The participants were highly conscious of the implications for the privacy of the videos they uploaded on YouTube for English learning. Most of the videos that were uploaded to complete course assignments were either uploaded unlisted or privately. The lecturer who assigned the assignment usually decided to upload it privately or unlisted. However, sometimes, students took the initiative to upload their videos privately or unlisted. One of the students' considerations was securing their privacy by limiting who could access and watch the video.

"The videos were uploaded unlisted because the lecturer himself or herself asked for it. I feel safer because I was not too exposed publicly. So, it was only for internal circles and for the sake of assignments." – Participant 1

The participants also used several steps to protect their YouTube accounts while learning English. One step to prevent phishing attempts on YouTube accounts was to exercise caution when clicking on advertising. Participants understand that there are possible threats and risks when using YouTube as an English learning tool. Understanding risk and threat involves being aware of the potential dangers that could happen in digital environments, such as malware, viruses, phishing attacks, and other forms of cyber threats that could compromise the security of someone's devices and the data stored on them (Law et al., 2018). Furthermore, some participants changed their YouTube account passwords regularly.

"I changed my password regularly, maybe every 2-3 months and I have to remember the password." – Participant 1

Students Interact and Collaborate with Other Language Learners through YouTube

The participants did peer-information through YouTube. It is one of the competencies mentioned in the Digital Literacy Global Framework. Peer information sharing in digital literacy refers to the ability to share data, information, and digital content with others through appropriate digital technologies (Law et al., 2018). Digital technologies mentioned previously refer to YouTube as an English learning tool. When participants found videos containing reliable and valuable information for learning English, they usually shared the video link with fellow students who were also YouTube users. The share link feature that is easily accessed

by participants is very helpful and beneficial in establishing interaction with other language learners. As one of the digital literacy competency areas, it is important for efficient digital communication and teamwork since it can improve learning outcomes by promoting knowledge exchange and critical thinking (Law et al., 2018). This knowledge exchange allows participants to learn from one another, find connections between concepts, and gain a collective perspective from the digital environment.

"I often shared information via YouTube with my friend who is also a language learner. When, I learned something valuable from YouTube, then I considered sharing the link with her." – Participant 3

"When I was learning in an English group with my friends, I would usually share the link to them when I discovered useful or helpful videos from YouTube." – Participant 4

The participants also collaborated on a video-making process to be uploaded to YouTube to fulfill teamwork assignments. Producing a video in teamwork encouraged creative expression and gave participants agency in putting together a project that reflected their voices. In carrying out this collaboration, participants benefit from their learning. According to the participants, collaborating in making and uploading videos to YouTube was mainly carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic some years ago when learning depended on online platforms, one of which was YouTube.

"At that time, it was an assignment from the Digital Learning Media Development course. We were asked to make a teaching video using animation. Well, we made the video together. Someone made the animation, someone did the voice-over, someone collected the vocabulary that we wanted to discuss, and lastly, someone edited and uploaded it on YouTube. We shared the tasks." – Participant 4

Participants along with their classmates shared the responsibilities that must be done in making videos. Participants got the benefit from the digital collaboration on YouTube. Collaboration through digital technology can foster a sense of community and shared mutual responsibility preparing learners for the collaborative nature of many modern work environments (Law et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

This research explored how students use YouTube as an English language learning tool while practicing digital literacy to support their learning process. The findings reveal some critical digital literacy practices that students engaged in while learning on YouTube that are meaningful to students. These practices are seen in 1.) Students employed their critical thinking skills to discern content trustworthiness, 2.) Students created and upload videos on YouTube aligned with their personalized learning goals, 3.) Students had an awareness of privacy and security issues, 4.) Students used YouTube to interact and synergize digitally. These findings show the versatility of YouTube as a platform for independent language learning when approached with digital literacy practice. Further research can examine how best teachers practice to guide students in determining credible and questionable sources of information for learning purpose on digital learning tools, such as YouTube or other digital platforms as the issue received the most significant attention from students.

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