



DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT STUDY SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS THROUGH DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

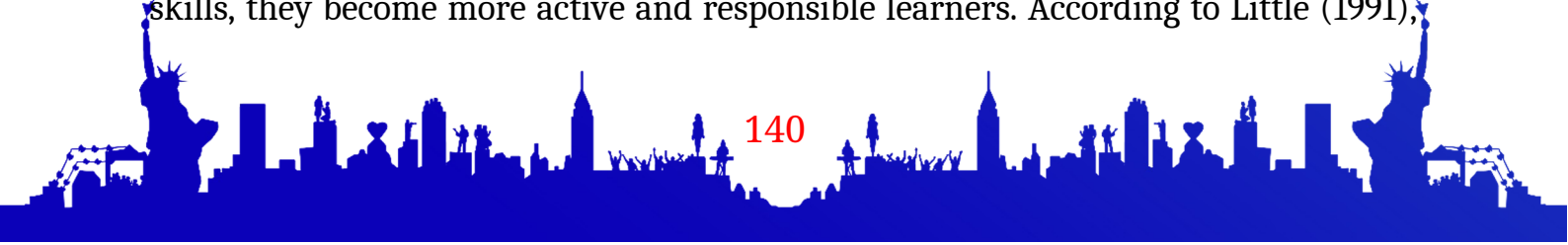
This article discusses the development of independent study skills among EFL learners through digital learning strategies. In modern language education, students are expected not only to learn English in the classroom but also to continue learning independently outside formal lessons. However, many EFL learners struggle with organizing their study time, reviewing vocabulary, practising listening, using online resources effectively, and evaluating their own progress. Digital learning strategies can help students become more responsible, motivated, and consistent in their language learning. The article explores how mobile applications, online dictionaries, digital flashcards, learning platforms, video materials, self-assessment tools, and study planners can support the development of independent study habits. It argues that digital tools are most effective when learners receive teacher guidance and clear study routines. The article concludes that developing independent study skills through digital learning strategies can improve learner autonomy, confidence, and long-term language progress.

Keywords: *independent study skills, EFL learners, digital learning strategies, learner autonomy, English language teaching, self-regulated learning, study habits, higher education.*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning does not happen only inside the classroom. Although classroom instruction plays an important role, students also need regular practice outside lessons in order to improve their language skills. This is especially true for EFL learners, because they often have limited opportunities to use English in their daily environment. For this reason, independent study skills are essential for successful language learning.

Independent study skills refer to learners' ability to organize, manage, and evaluate their own learning. These skills include planning study time, reviewing vocabulary, practising listening and speaking, reading regularly, taking notes, using learning resources, setting goals, and checking progress. When students develop these skills, they become more active and responsible learners. According to Little (1991),





learner autonomy is an important part of language learning because students need to take responsibility for their own progress.

However, many EFL learners do not have strong independent study habits. Some students study only before exams. Others depend completely on the teacher and do not know how to practise English alone. Some learners use digital tools, but without a clear purpose. For example, they may watch English videos or use mobile applications, but they may not review vocabulary, take notes, or practise language actively. This shows that students need not only access to digital resources, but also guidance on how to use them effectively.

Digital learning strategies can help solve this problem. In modern education, students have access to smartphones, online dictionaries, videos, podcasts, digital flashcards, grammar websites, language applications, and learning platforms. These tools can make English learning more flexible and personal. Learners can practise vocabulary on the way to university, listen to English at home, watch short videos, complete online quizzes, or record themselves speaking. Godwin-Jones (2011) notes that mobile and digital tools can support language learning by giving learners more opportunities to practise beyond the classroom.

One useful digital strategy is goal setting. Students can use digital planners, notes applications, or learning platforms to set weekly language goals. For example, an A2 learner may decide to learn twenty new words, listen to three short dialogues, and write five simple sentences during one week. Clear goals help learners understand what they need to do and make learning more organized. Zimmerman (2002) explains that self-regulated learners are able to set goals, monitor their learning, and reflect on their progress.

Vocabulary learning is another area where digital strategies are highly useful. Many learners forget new words because they do not review them regularly. Digital flashcards and spaced repetition applications can help students revise vocabulary at planned intervals. This is more effective than memorizing many words at once. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure and active use. Digital tools can support this process by reminding students to review words and by giving quick feedback.

Online dictionaries can also support independent study. A good online dictionary does not only give translation; it can provide pronunciation, example sentences, word forms, collocations, and usage notes. For example, when students search for a word such as “improve,” they can learn expressions like “improve skills,” “improve performance,” and “improve communication.” This helps learners use vocabulary more naturally. Schmitt (2000) states that vocabulary knowledge includes not only meaning, but also form, use, and word associations.





Listening practice can also be improved through digital learning strategies. Many EFL learners find listening difficult because they are not exposed to natural English often enough. Digital materials such as podcasts, short videos, interviews, and online dialogues can give students regular listening practice. However, learners need a clear method. They can first listen for the main idea, then listen again for details, and finally write down useful words or phrases. Field (2008) argues that listening should be taught as an active process in which learners predict, recognize, interpret, and evaluate spoken language.

Speaking practice can also be supported by digital tools. Students can record their voice, compare their pronunciation with model audio, practise with speech recognition tools, or use AI chatbots for short conversations. These activities are useful because many learners feel shy when speaking in class. Digital speaking practice gives them a private and low-pressure environment. However, students should not only repeat sentences mechanically. They should use language meaningfully by describing their day, answering questions, summarizing videos, or practising dialogues.

Reading skills can be developed through graded digital texts, online articles, short stories, and educational websites. Independent reading helps learners increase vocabulary, improve grammar awareness, and build confidence. Teachers can guide students to choose texts that match their level. If the text is too difficult, learners may become discouraged. If it is too easy, they may not develop. Harmer (2015) notes that suitable materials should match learners' level, interests, and learning goals.

Another important digital strategy is self-assessment. Students can use online quizzes, checklists, learning journals, or progress trackers to evaluate their own learning. For example, after studying a unit, students can ask themselves: "Can I use the new vocabulary?", "Can I understand a short conversation?", "Can I write a simple paragraph?", or "What should I review again?" Self-assessment helps learners become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. According to Benson (2011), reflection is an important part of autonomous learning because it helps students make better decisions about their study process.

Teacher guidance remains essential in developing independent study skills. Digital tools alone do not guarantee effective learning. Some students may become distracted by social media, choose unsuitable resources, or study without consistency. Therefore, teachers should help learners build simple and realistic study routines. For example, the teacher may recommend that students spend ten minutes a day reviewing vocabulary, listen to one short English audio three times a week, and complete one short speaking recording every week.





Teachers can also integrate digital independent study with classroom activities. For example, students may learn vocabulary through flashcards at home and then use those words in pair work during the lesson. They may watch a short video before class and discuss it in class. They may complete an online quiz after the lesson and bring questions to the next class. This connection between classroom learning and independent study makes digital strategies more meaningful.

In higher education, independent study skills are especially important. University students are expected to manage their learning more responsibly than school pupils. They need to prepare for lessons, complete assignments, search for information, and develop professional skills. For students at Cyber University, digital learning strategies are particularly relevant because technology is already part of their academic environment. English instructors can use this advantage to help students build effective study habits.

Developing independent study skills also increases learner confidence. When students know how to study by themselves, they feel more in control of their progress. They do not wait only for the teacher to explain everything. They become able to review, practise, search, correct, and improve independently. This confidence can lead to better motivation and more consistent learning.

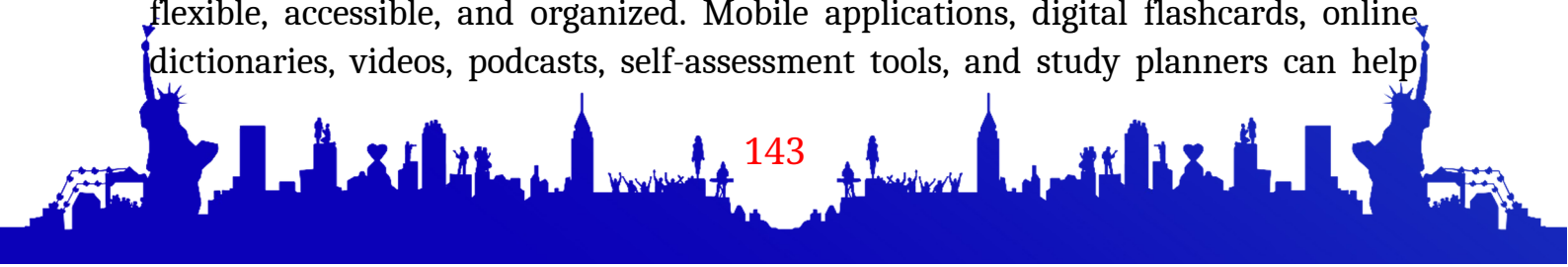
At the same time, independent study should be realistic. Students should not be given too many digital tasks at once. A simple routine is often more effective than a complicated plan. For example, five to ten minutes of daily vocabulary review may be more useful than one long study session once a month. The main goal is to help learners develop regular and sustainable habits.

Overall, digital learning strategies can play an important role in developing independent study skills among EFL learners. They provide flexibility, immediate feedback, repeated practice, and access to authentic language materials. However, their success depends on clear guidance, suitable resources, and purposeful use. When teachers help students use digital tools effectively, learners can become more autonomous, confident, and successful in English language learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, independent study skills are essential for EFL learners because classroom instruction alone is not enough for long-term language development. Students need to practise English regularly, review vocabulary, improve listening and speaking skills, read suitable materials, and evaluate their progress outside the classroom.

Digital learning strategies can support this process by making learning more flexible, accessible, and organized. Mobile applications, digital flashcards, online dictionaries, videos, podcasts, self-assessment tools, and study planners can help





students develop better study habits. These tools encourage regular practice, learner autonomy, and active engagement with English.

However, digital tools should be used with clear educational purpose. Teachers should guide students in choosing suitable resources, setting realistic goals, and connecting independent study with classroom learning. When digital strategies are used responsibly, they can help EFL learners become more independent, motivated, and confident.

The article concludes that developing independent study skills through digital learning strategies is an effective approach in modern English language teaching. It prepares learners not only to succeed in English classes, but also to continue learning throughout their academic and professional lives.

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