

TECHNOLOGY-BASED INDEPENDENT TOEFL LEARNING THROUGH YouTube AMONG NON-ENGLISH MAJORS

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has transformed English language learning practices, particularly in independent learning environments. One of the most widely used digital platforms is YouTube, which provides flexible and accessible learning resources for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study aimed to explore the strategies used by non-English major students in learning TOEFL Listening independently through YouTube and to examine how they manage their learning process through self-regulated learning practices. This research employed a qualitative descriptive exploratory design. The participants were non-English major students at Universitas Negeri Semarang who had experience using YouTube for TOEFL Listening preparation. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of learning strategies and technology-based learning behaviors. The findings revealed three major themes: cognitive strategies in understanding TOEFL Listening, metacognitive strategies in independent learning, and the use of YouTube as a technology-based learning platform. The students actively applied strategies such as focusing on keywords, replaying audio, using subtitles, and adjusting playback speed. The findings also showed that students practiced self-regulated learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning progress. In addition, YouTube was perceived as a flexible and supportive platform for independent TOEFL learning despite challenges related to native speaker speed, accents, and digital distractions. In conclusion, successful TOEFL Listening learning through YouTube depends not only on technology availability but also on students' ability to manage their independent learning effectively.

Keyword - technology-based learning, independent learning, TOEFL learning strategies, self-regulated learning, YouTube, EFL learners

Introduction

The development of digital technology in recent years has brought significant changes to teaching practices, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), the learning process is no longer limited to formal classrooms but also takes place through technology-based learning environments that enable students to learn independently (Anderson Terry, 2008). Digital technology provides broader opportunities for language learners to gain more flexible access to learning resources and supports independent learning outside the formal classroom setting (Widiawati, 2022).

One widely used digital platform is YouTube, as it provides authentic, flexible, and easily accessible learning materials for learners from diverse educational backgrounds (Yuyun & Simamora, 2021). (Wang & Chen, 2020) explain that YouTube allows learners to independently access authentic English language materials through a flexible digital learning environment. Various studies indicate that YouTube can support English language learning through interactive audiovisual exposure and the use of authentic language, particularly in enhancing listening skills (Othman et al., 2023). In addition to serving as a source of learning materials, YouTube also provides learners with opportunities to develop learner autonomy through learning outside the formal classroom (Lai & Gu, 2011).

Therefore, YouTube is increasingly being utilized as a medium for self-directed English language learning outside the classroom.

The use of digital platforms in English language learning is also evident in preparation for standardized English proficiency tests, such as the TOEFL ITP (Test of English as a Foreign Language – Institutional Testing Program). The TOEFL is one of the instruments used to measure the academic English proficiency of non-native speakers (Phillips, 2001) and serves as a critical requirement in both academic and professional fields. At many universities in Indonesia, TOEFL scores are used as graduation requirements, for scholarship applications, and for other academic purposes. However, for non-English major students, the TOEFL is often seen as a challenge due to limited exposure to English within their academic environments (Gunantar & Rosaria, 2023).

Among all sections of the TOEFL, the Listening Section is one of the most difficult because it requires the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend spoken information in various academic contexts. In the context of listening comprehension, learners often face difficulties due to the speaking speed of native speakers and their limited vocabulary (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Additionally, not all students have the opportunity to take formal TOEFL preparation courses due to time constraints, cost, and limited access to learning resources. These conditions encourage students to utilize technology-based platforms, such as YouTube, as an alternative for self-directed TOEFL learning.

As a digital learning platform, YouTube provides various TOEFL learning resources, particularly for the Listening Section, such as listening exercises, simulated academic conversations, strategies for understanding audio, and discussions of TOEFL listening

questions. Through features like video replay, audio speed adjustment, and the flexibility to choose materials according to their needs, YouTube allows learners to manage their own learning process more independently. These characteristics align with the concept of self-regulated learning. (Zimmerman, 2002) explains that self-regulated learning is a process in which learners actively manage their learning through the stages of planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

In technology-based learning, students do not merely act as passive recipients of information but also as learners who actively determine learning strategies, select learning resources, and control their own learning process. (Lai & Gu, 2011) state that the use of technology in language learning enables learners to develop greater self-directed control over their learning through activities outside formal classroom settings. Nevertheless, learning for the TOEFL via YouTube also presents various challenges. Previous research indicates that students still face difficulties in understanding spoken information, limited vocabulary mastery, and challenges keeping up with the audio speed in the TOEFL Listening Section (Meilinda & Yuliah, 2019). Additionally, learning via YouTube tends to be less structured compared to formal classroom instruction, thus requiring a higher level of self-directed learning (Marselina, 2019).

Several studies have examined the use of YouTube in technology-based English language learning and TOEFL preparation. (Devi et al., 2025) found that YouTube is viewed as a flexible, easily accessible learning medium capable of boosting students' motivation to study for the TOEFL. Other research also indicates that the use of YouTube as a medium for English language learning during the pandemic has a positive

impact on student engagement and learning outcomes (Rasman, 2021). Additionally, (Wang & Chen, 2020) explain that the use of YouTube in English language learning is closely related to the application of self-regulated learning, as students actively select materials, manage their study time, and evaluate their understanding through digital content.

Although various studies have discussed the use of YouTube in English language learning, most research still focuses on general English language learning, classroom learning outcomes, or students' perceptions of digital media. Research specifically exploring how non-English major students independently manage their TOEFL learning through YouTube, particularly in the Listening Section, remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore the learning strategies used by non-English major students in studying the TOEFL Listening Section via YouTube, how they manage the self-directed learning process, and how they view YouTube's role in supporting technology-based TOEFL learning. This study is expected to contribute to the study of technology-based learning and self-regulated learning in the context of EFL, particularly regarding self-directed TOEFL learning.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-exploratory approach to understand and describe the self-directed learning strategies used by non-English major students through the use of YouTube. The descriptive-qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach was chosen because the study focuses on experiences, learning strategies, and how students manage

their learning processes from the participants' perspective. This study was conducted among non-English major students at Semarang State University who have taken or are preparing to take the TOEFL ITP test.

The selection of participants was based on the consideration that non-English major students generally face limitations in access to formal English language instruction, study time, and an environment that supports active English language use. These conditions encourage them to utilize digital platforms, such as YouTube, as an alternative for self-directed TOEFL learning. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling with specific criteria, namely non-English major students who had used YouTube as a medium for TOEFL learning, particularly for the TOEFL Listening Section. This technique was used because the researcher needed participants with experience relevant to the research focus so they could provide in-depth information regarding technology-based self-directed learning strategies.

In data collection, this study used two instruments: a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire served as a supplementary tool to obtain an initial overview of the self-directed learning strategies students employed prior to the in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and consisted of 27 statement items on a five-point Likert scale: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. The statements in the questionnaire focused on self-directed TOEFL learning activities, the use of YouTube in the learning process, and aspects of self-regulated learning such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation of learning.

The primary instrument in this study was a semi-structured interview used to explore in greater depth students' learning experiences, the strategies employed during self-directed TOEFL learning, and the utilization of YouTube as a technology-based learning medium. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to obtain more in-depth and flexible data through follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Kallio et al., 2016). The interviews consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing participants to provide more detailed explanations while giving the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on the participants' answers. The focus of the interviews included how students planned their learning process, monitored their learning progress, evaluated their understanding, and their perceptions of YouTube's role in supporting self-directed TOEFL learning.

Interview data were collected in person or via WhatsApp video calls, depending on the participants' availability. All interviews were recorded using the researcher's smartphone, then transcribed and double-checked to ensure data accuracy. The quotes used in this study are written in Indonesian because the interviews were conducted in Indonesian. The research data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of technology-based self-directed learning strategies and participants' learning experiences. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) explain that thematic analysis is conducted through several stages: understanding the data, coding, grouping categories, and developing main themes based on patterns found in the data.

In this study, the analysis process was conducted through several stages: repeatedly reading and understanding all the data, coding the key data, grouping codes into

similar categories, and developing main themes related to self-directed TOEFL learning strategies via YouTube. The analysis was conducted systematically so that the meaning contained in the participants' experiences could be deeply understood and aligned with the research objectives. To enhance data credibility, the interview transcripts were reviewed and compared with the questionnaire results, allowing the researcher to ensure the consistency of the information provided by the participants.

Finding and Discussion

The results of the thematic analysis indicate that there are three main patterns of technology-based self-directed TOEFL learning strategies using YouTube among non-English major students, namely: (1) cognitive strategies for understanding TOEFL Listening, (2) metacognitive strategies in self-directed learning, and (3) the use of YouTube as a technology-based learning medium. These three themes demonstrate how students actively manage their learning processes when utilizing digital technology to support their TOEFL preparation.

Cognitive Strategies for Understanding TOEFL Listening

The questionnaire results indicate that non-English major students employ various cognitive strategies while studying TOEFL Listening via YouTube. The most dominant strategies include replaying the listening audio, focusing on keywords, and noting down important vocabulary.

Table 1. Cognitive Strategies Used by Non-English Major Students

Learning Strategies	Dominant Frequency
Repeating Listening Audio	Often
Focusing on Key Words	Always
Not Down Important Vocabulary	Sometimes

The findings from the questionnaire were corroborated by the interview results. Participants explained that they actively used specific strategies to understand the TOEFL Listening audio, rather than simply listening passively. One participant stated:

Excerpt 1

“Sebelum audionya mulai, saya cepet-cepet baca pilihan jawabannya... jadi otak saya udah siap nangkep kata kunci tertentu daripada coba memahami semua kata malah jadi kehilangan fokus”

The excerpt shows that students tend to use a keyword-focusing strategy to predict important information before the audio is played. This finding indicates that students employ a selective attention strategy to reduce the difficulty of processing the rapidly delivered TOEFL audio. (Vandergrift, 1997) explains that the keyword-focusing strategy is part of the cognitive strategies in listening comprehension that help learners focus their attention on important information during the listening process.

Rather than trying to understand every word, students prefer to focus their attention on key information that can help them answer

questions more effectively. This finding aligns with previous research showing that cognitive strategies in listening help EFL learners process spoken information more efficiently. The use of keyword-focusing strategies also indicates active listening behavior, as students consciously direct their attention to avoid cognitive overload when encountering complex listening material. In this context, YouTube provides repeated exposure to authentic English, allowing students to practice their listening skills independently and flexibly.

Metacognitive Strategies in Self-Directed Learning

Data analysis shows that students employ various metacognitive strategies while studying for the TOEFL independently via YouTube. These strategies include learning planning, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Table 2. Students' Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive Activities	Dominant Frequency
Determining learning targets	Sometimes
Repeating audio when you don't understand	Often
Checking answers after practice	Often
Evaluating learning outcomes	Always

Interview results indicate that students consciously organize their self-directed learning process before beginning TOEFL practice. Participants explained that they select YouTube channels based on the difficulty level of the material and adapt them to their abilities.

Excerpt 2

“Saya akan cari channel YouTube yang sering direkomendasikan orang-orang, kemudian memilah videonya berdasarkan level kesulitannya. Jadi...waktu belajar nggak terlalu susah di awal.”

This excerpt shows that students engage in a planning phase before studying by selecting learning resources appropriate to their skill level. This behavior reflects an important aspect of self-regulated learning, particularly the planning stage, where learners prepare strategies and learning resources before engaging in learning activities. (Zimmerman, 2002) explains that learners with self-regulated learning skills actively set their own goals, strategies, and learning resources.

During the monitoring stage, students recognize the difficulties they encounter when understanding the listening audio and then adjust their learning strategies.

Excerpt 3

“kalau belum paham, aku ulang lagi audionya sambil liat subtitle, dan mencatat kosakata penting atau potongan kalimat.”

This excerpt shows that students actively monitor their understanding while studying. Behaviors such as replaying the audio, using subtitles, and noting down important vocabulary reflect the presence of metacognitive monitoring, as students evaluate their level of understanding and adjust their learning strategies when they have difficulty understanding the audio. This

finding supports the concept of self-regulated learning proposed by (Pintrich, 2004), which emphasizes the importance of monitoring skills in helping learners control their learning processes.

In addition to planning and monitoring, students also evaluate their learning outcomes after completing the listening exercises.

Excerpt 4

“Karena keterbatasan kosakata dalam bahasa Inggris, ditambah lagi kalau pakai audio native speaker pengucapannya cepat banget...jadi aku perlambat speed-nya jadi 0.75x dulu biar paham konteks dan pengucapannya. Kemudian, cara aku mengevaluasi hasil belajar dengan sering latihan Listening dan lihat ada peningkatan dalam menjawab soal atau nggak.”

The excerpt shows that students are aware of the learning difficulties they face and strive to overcome them using the technological features available on YouTube. The use of audio speed adjustment features and repeated listening practice indicates the presence of self-monitoring and self-evaluation processes in self-directed learning. These findings reinforce Zimmerman’s (2002) theory, which states that learners capable of self-regulating their learning will actively evaluate their learning outcomes and adjust their strategies when encountering difficulties.

Overall, the research findings indicate that non-English major students are not passive learners. Instead, they actively manage the learning process through planning, monitoring, and evaluation when preparing for the TOEFL Listening section independently via YouTube.

The Use of YouTube as a Technology-Based Medium

The research findings also indicate that students have a positive perception of YouTube as a technology-based learning medium that supports independent TOEFL study. Students utilize various technological features available on YouTube to aid their listening practice.

Table 3. The Use of YouTube as a Technology-Based Medium

YouTube Utilization	Dominant Frequency
Playback control features	Always
Use of subtitles	Often
Ease of access	Always
Various listening materials	Always
Supports independent learning	Often

Participants explained that YouTube helps them tailor the learning process to their individual needs. Additionally, students view YouTube as a flexible, easily accessible, and practical learning medium for self-directed TOEFL preparation.

Excerpt 5

“Fitur pause, replay, dan subtitle sangatlah membantu dalam proses belajar mandiri. Kayak...speed audio bisa disesuaikan semau kita, ketersediaan subtitle pada audio, dan kita bisa mengulang penjelasan soal sebanyak yang kita mau tanpa batas waktu, sehingga kita bisa menyerap pemahaman lebih maksimal”

These excerpts show that YouTube’s features provide students with greater control over their learning as they manage their study activities. Features such as replay, subtitles,

and audio speed settings help students overcome listening difficulties and improve their understanding of TOEFL Listening material. These findings indicate that YouTube functions not only as a source of learning materials but also as a digital learning environment that supports self-regulated learning.

These findings align with the research by (Wang & Chen, 2020), which explains that language learning via YouTube is closely related to learners’ ability to manage their own learning strategies and processes. Additionally, (Harahab Putri, 2019) also states that YouTube supports self-directed learning because it provides flexible learning access and allows learners to tailor the learning process to their needs. Through YouTube, students can select materials according to their needs, set their own learning pace, and access learning materials repeatedly. However, the effectiveness of YouTube-based learning remains influenced by students’ ability to maintain focus, select appropriate content, and manage distractions during the self-directed learning process.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that non-English major students employ various learning strategies when studying for the TOEFL Listening section independently via YouTube, including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and the use of digital technology features. Students do not merely act as passive learners but actively manage their learning process through planning, monitoring, and evaluation. These findings indicate the presence of self-regulated learning practices in technology-based TOEFL learning.

Furthermore, YouTube is viewed as a flexible, easily accessible learning medium that supports students’ independent learning

needs through features such as replay, subtitles, playback speed, and a variety of listening materials. Nevertheless, students still face several challenges, such as the speaking speed of native speakers, differences in accents, digital distractions, and inconsistent quality of learning content.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the success of TOEFL Listening learning via YouTube is influenced not only by the

availability of technology but also by students' ability to select appropriate learning strategies and effectively manage the self-directed learning process. Thus, YouTube can function not only as a source of learning materials but also as a digital learning environment that supports learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in the context of EFL instruction.

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