



## BOOK REVIEW

**Kwok, Virginia H. Y. (2023).** *Language learning in the digital age: YouTube and learners of English as a foreign language.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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YouTube has gained global popularity for language education, especially among young language learners in informal contexts. *Language Learning in the Digital Age: YouTube and Learners of English as a Foreign Language* by Virginia H. Y. Kwok explores how university students in Hong Kong use YouTube to enhance their English language proficiency outside formal classroom settings. By focusing on learners' perspectives, this book provides a nuanced understanding of a variety of factors that shape student engagement with YouTube and its role in facilitating autonomous and self-directed language learning. Through a qualitative, case study approach, the author delves into the diverse ways students navigate and personalise their language learning opportunities on YouTube.

The book is grounded in a narrative inquiry approach. This methodology is particularly suited to exploring students' attitudes, motivations, and behaviours that characterise out-of-class language learning, which are otherwise difficult to capture. The book accounts for students' stories and experiences in a way that highlights the 'subjective' realities of language learners. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, reflective learning journals, and questionnaires designed to elicit detailed accounts of students' perceptions and practices. Participants from a university in Hong Kong represented a range of English language proficiency levels, academic goals, and cultural backgrounds. This multi-layered approach allowed the author to capture the diversity and complexity of learners' interactions with YouTube, providing insights into individual differences in learning experiences. Therefore, by exploring YouTube's educational affordances through students' voices, this book offers a unique lens on how digital platforms reshape technology-enhanced language education.

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A key finding of the study is that YouTube served as a ‘personalised language laboratory’ for students who used it to practice and enhanced specific language skills according to their personal goals. The author describes how students strategically select content that aligns with their interests and learning styles, such as enhancing vocabulary through song lyrics or improving pronunciation with video tutorials. This practice demonstrates students’ agency in shaping their own learning pathways, which is critical for organising autonomous learning in the digital age. The findings also reveal that students perceived YouTube as a flexible, engaging, and easily accessible resource that enabled them to ‘experiment’ with the language, thus supporting risk-taking and creative exploration (which are often limited in formal classroom settings).

Furthermore, the findings show a variety of factors influence learners’ perceptions of YouTube as a language learning tool. These factors include students’ previous experiences with language learning, the influence of teachers and peers, and student self-efficacy in navigating digital content. The author also identifies five key qualities that facilitate autonomous and experiential learning: intrinsic motivation, digital literacy, self-regulation, resilience, and cultural adaptability. By cultivating these qualities, students in this study could make the most of out-of-class resources like YouTube and develop skills that extend beyond language acquisition and contribute to whole-person development.

The implications of this study are important for educators and policymakers. The author emphasises the potential for YouTube and similar platforms to supplement formal education by addressing the diverse needs of younger learners. The author recommends practical strategies for teachers to guide students in selecting appropriate YouTube content and integrating digital media literacy training into the curriculum. This approach aims to foster a balance between structured in-class and unstructured, student-driven exploration and to bridge gaps between formal and informal language learning environments. The author further highlights the importance of training learners to manage their time effectively when exploring digital content.

The book not only advances our understanding of digital media’s role in language learning, but also raises important questions for future research. The author suggests questions, for example, how can educational institutions leverage platforms like YouTube to support out-of-class learning without interfering with learners’ autonomy, and what kinds of training do students need to navigate these digital resources effectively? These questions stress the need for ongoing research into digital literacy, learner autonomy, and the changing dynamics between formal and informal language learning spaces.

In summary, the study’s methodological rigor and its focus on learners’ narratives contribute to the diversity and individuality in how students approach language learning as well as the challenges and opportunities for educators in the digital age. For those interested in the potential of technology to empower language learners, this book is recommended.

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