



## INCORPORATING INFORMAL DIGITAL LEARNING OF ENGLISH (IDLE) IN THE SPEAKING CLASSROOM: STUDENT'S PERCEPTION AND ITS IMPACT ON SPEAKING ABILITY

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### **Abstract:**

Studies have demonstrated that engagement in IDLE activities enhances students' English proficiency. However, incorporating IDLE in the classroom is still under-studied in the ELT area. Addressing the research gap, the study explores the perception of university students who enrolled in a speaking course on IDLE incorporation in the classroom and its impact on their speaking ability. A qualitative case study design was used to uncover this issue by inviting 17 first-year English Department students enrolled in a speaking course and involved in integrating IDLE with classroom activities for 7 weeks to participate in this study. Data were collected through focus group interviews, observation, and gaining documents, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study shows that the students perceive the IDLE integration as enjoyable, increases willingness to communicate, promotes peer sharing and learning, and encourages students to engage with English content on social media. Additionally, IDLE integration develops students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills, which enhance students' speaking ability. This study suggests that the incorporation of IDLE in the classroom has a potent impact on improving English speaking proficiency.

**Keywords:** *IDLE, Incorporation, Speaking Skill*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of digital technology today allows English language learners to improve their four language skills: listening, speaking, listening, and writing, as well as other supporting components, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. In this case, language learners can independently connect to English social media (such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) English apps are available on smart devices, and you can access other digital resources, both on devices and on laptops/desktops at home, in the context of learning outside the classroom; this is known as informal digital learning of English or in the terminology used in English literature, "Informal Digital Learning of English - IDLE" (Lee, 2020).

Some recent studies confirm that when students engage in IDLE activities with intensive quantity and quality, it has an impact on increased vocabulary (Lee & Lee, 2020) students, speaking skills development, and high TOEIC test scores achievement (Lee, 2020); increased motivation and enjoyment of language learning (Lee & Lee, 2020, improved speaking, writing and listening skills, as well as the improvement of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Atmojo, 2022). In particular, (Rahmawati et al., 2019) found that students who practiced IDLE in the speaking aspect of English experienced improvements in language fluency, increased vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and good pronunciation. Lee and Drajadi (2019) highlighted the results of their survey on the relationship between IDLE and students' willingness to communicate.

The emergence of studies on the good impact of IDLE above does not seem to be realized by students. The chief researcher, for instance, observed that when teaching



speaking courses to the first semester students in the undergraduate English education study program, many students had not taken advantage of digital resources for improving their English via informal learning mode, both in quantity and quantity activities. Not surprisingly, many students have low vocabulary skills (input), directly related to low English speaking proficiency. This phenomenon may also occur in other formal schools at the secondary level. Therefore, teachers and lecturers as learning facilitators can introduce and integrate IDLE activities to students outside and inside the classroom to support the mastery of English receptive and productive skills.

Several studies have reported the integration of IDLE by teachers in the classroom. However, these studies are still limited, especially in the Indonesian context, such as using digital storytelling (Drajati et al., 2023) and vlogging to improve speaking skills (Maulidiyah, 2020), tik-tok in speaking classes (Dewi, 2023). These research findings suggest that using digital learning resources outside the classroom can increase students' enjoyment, motivation, and self-regulation in learning English.

This current study attempts to fill this void by exploring the students' views on integrating IDLE exposure with classroom activities (further explained in the methods section). Hence, this research aims to investigate (1) the students' perception of the incorporation of IDLE in the speaking classroom and (2) their views on speaking ability improvement. This study will add more insights into the potential of IDLE integration with classroom English teaching to improve English proficiency, particularly the oral ones. The foci of the research questions are:

1. How do the students perceive the incorporation of IDLE in a speaking classroom?
2. How do they perceive its impacts on their speaking ability?

### **1.1 Informal Digital Learning of English: Types and Activities**

The term informal digital learning of English (IDLE) has become the latest study in English language learning in out-of-class contexts today. The term was introduced by Dr. Ju Seong Lee from the University of Education, Hong Kong, in 2017 (Lee, 2017), who views English language learners' increasingly widespread use of digital applications and social media outside the context of in-class learning. According to Lee (2019), IDLE can be grouped into two types: IDLE in extracurricular and Extramural contexts. In the first type, IDLE has the characteristics of:

1. Learners who are in control of learning (self-directed)
2. Language learning in semi-structured (informal) domains
3. Language learning occurs outside the classroom but is still connected to the formal language program.

For example, a student watches YouTube videos outside class to understand a concept. However, the activity is done to fulfill the assignment given by the lecturer for one of the courses (Lee, 2019). On the other hand, in the second type, IDLE has the following characteristics:



1. the learner is in control of learning (self-directed)
2. it takes place naturally (naturalistic)
3. digital English learning is unstructured and in an out-of-class environment,
4. is independent

In this type, a student speaks English while playing an online game with a fellow player or watching a vlogger's video on YouTube (Lee, 2019). In this study, referring to the above characteristics, the researchers implemented the first type of IDLE activity because all of the IDLE activities carried out by students became part of the learning activities of the courses that students follow. However, students have complete control over IDLE activities.

IDLE consists of two types of activity: (1) receptive-related activities, which focus on understanding English content, and productive-related activities, which prioritize language use (Lee & Drajati, 2019). (Lee (2022) then summarizes some activities related to the above types of IDLE.

**a. Receptive IDLE**

1. using online dictionaries
2. reading online news
3. reading English content through social media
4. reading English posts and information on online forums
5. reading statuses and comments from other people in English on social media
6. reading online entertainment content (for example, shopping, comics, sports, and movies)
7. reading English instructions when playing online games.
8. listening to songs with English lyrics online
9. watching sports events online or on English TV.
10. Watching English movies or dramas online or through TV.
11. Watching TV online without subtitles.
12. watching short videos online
13. watching educational content in English, such as TED Talks, lectures, and documentaries) online or via TV
14. watching English YouTube video clips.

**b. Productive IDLE**

1. searching for various English-language information through Google
2. posting English comments on social media
3. leaving English comments on online pages
4. uploading English song lyrics on Facebook
5. writing a blog in English
6. Writing a current status in English on a social media account
7. uploading pictures with captions and/or hashtags in English on social media accounts.
8. posting English comments and information in online forums



9. sending English emails to others
10. talking in English with someone on the phone online
11. having a conversation with a fellow online game player in English
12. having a conversation with someone through social media in English
13. have a video call with someone through social media
14. create and upload online videos in English
15. interacting with others in English live through social media

### **1.2 Impact of IDLE on Speaking Skills and Other Aspects of Language**

The study of the impact of IDLE activities on English language learners has been a concern of researchers in this field, although it is still minimal in the Indonesian context. In terms of benefits to improving speaking skills, a study by Rahmawati et al. (2019) showed that receptive (such as watching movies and YouTube videos) and productive (sending messages, video calls) IDLE activities had an impact on improving vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, which in turn supported fluency in English. Additionally, survey research conducted by Lee and Drajati (2019) on Indonesian students who practiced productive IDLE suggests that their desire to communicate in English increased. Similarly, a large-scale study by Nugroho (2021) confirmed that the engagement of 279 English language education students in receptive and productive IDLE contributed significantly to improving their ability to communicate in English. Moreover, Lee (2019a) found that Korean students who practiced various IDLE activities improved their speaking and vocabulary skills and their performance on the language proficiency test (TOEC).

In addition to the above impacts, research has also found the effects of IDLE activities on receptive skills and vocabulary enhancement. Lee (2019a), in particular, found that various IDLE activities focusing on language meaning and form played an important role in increasing the vocabulary acquisition of English language learners in Korea. In particular, a recent study by Maulida et al. (2022) captured sixteen students at a university in East Java who practiced IDLE through social media, watching videos, listening to audio, and using language applications. The results showed that each student experienced increased receptive skills (listening and reading).

### **1.3 Integration of IDLE in Teaching Speaking**

Informal digital learning of English has more power than formal teaching in the classroom. The advantages of IDLE lie in authentic input on social media, developing learning independence, being available 24 hours a day, and the availability of various materials that can be accessed by language learners (Dressman & Lee, 2021). Moreover, the impactful result on the students' English improvement could be prevalent if integrated into formal classroom learning. In terms of speaking improvement, this integration can allow students to access meaningful input when practicing receptive IDLE and provide ample opportunities to share what they have gained with classmates through speaking practice.



However, more studies need to be done exploring the potential benefits of this integration on this matter to provide a solid claim. This current study will address this gap, given the scarcity of studies investigating it.

Regarding the type of integration in the classroom, Dressman and Lee (2021) offer three activities that teachers/lecturers can do in the school: (1) vlogging and podcasting, (2) using YouTube, (3) becoming an IDLE ethnographer with students. In speaking classes, other forms offered are digital storytelling (Drajati et al., 2023) and tik-tok (Dewi, 2023).

## 2. METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative case study design to understand the students' view on their involvement in a 7-week program incorporating IDLE activities in the speaking classroom when attending a course (Merriam, 2019). Eighteen students enrolled in this study were identified as having low vocabulary input and poor speaking ability. They were asked to be exposed to different types of social media (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok), online recourses, and applications (webtoon or Wattpad) by watching and reading a different type of topic every week. Then, they had to report in a 3-minute video recording and submit it to Google Classroom for review by the first researcher. In the classroom, every week, students engaged in some activities to share their IDLE activities with classmates through 4/3/2 activity (students spoke for 2/3/4 minutes with different partners) and individual and group presentations.

After the program, the students were invited to attend a focus-group interview (four groups) to explore their views. Data were also obtained from gaining documents (photos, videos, students' video reflections, and PPT slides). All data were analyzed using thematic analysis to find particular themes, patterns, or categories that answer the research questions.

## 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Positive views on the IDLE incorporation in the classroom

The students positively view the integration of IDLE activities in the school based on four themes: 1) enjoyable activities, (2) promoting collegial learning and sharing, (3) encouraging students to access social media for learning purposes, and (4) promoting self and peer-practice.

### 3.2 Enjoyable activities

Most of the students argued that they enjoyed the activities as it was delivered in a fun way. For instance, 4/3/2 activities allowed them to share what they had learned from videos or read from online resources with classmates in a less intimidating manner. They could also learn information or correct language use from friends. Nation and Newton (2008) argued that the 4/3/2 technique allows students to be confident speaking as they have prepared and organized what to share with their listeners without being afraid to interrupt. Additionally, they enjoyed sharing or presenting what they had learned outside school in the classroom. They could create interesting slides and learn new things from their topics or others.



Although delivering a presentation might be a threatening activity for others, they enjoyed it as it boosted creativity, and did it in a friendly manner. Riadil (2020) found that oral presentation improves students' speaking skills.

### **3.3 Promoting Collegial Learning**

The students view the activities provide ample opportunities to learn from others. They can learn, for instance, how to pronounce a phrase or expression correctly and understand their peers' content when engaging in the assigned activities. In speaking classrooms, Sembiring and Dewi (2023) found that their survey study with 100 high school students in Malang suggests that students prefer collaborative learning (sharing) as they can do tasks together and learn from each other.

### **3.4 Encouraging students to access social media for learning purposes**

The students in this study also affirm that the IDLE integration encourages them to access social media for learning. They favored learning grammar, particular expressions, stories, infotainment, or other interesting topics. Amalia and Gumindari (2023) review that learning English from social media increases students' interest in learning English. Additionally, Halawa (2024) found that students deemed social media a fun way to learn English as they can learn it outside the classroom and without any pressures.

### **3.5 Promote self and Peer practice.**

Another factor that made the students positively view the IDLE integration in the classroom is it promotes self and peer practice. They argued that frequent self-practice was done before they went into classroom activities. Additionally, they also practiced speaking outside the classroom with their colleagues.

### **3.6 IDLE Incorporation on Speaking Ability**

Concerning the students' perception of the impact of IDLE integration in the classroom on their speaking ability, they believe that it boosts their confidence to speak English and reduces their anxiety. Additionally, the activities increase their willingness to speak English and improve their pronunciation. Other benefits are related to the improvement of listening skills and vocabulary possession. These later impacts can be associated with the improvement of speaking skills.

One possible explanation for this improvement in speaking ability is that the integration of IDLE in the classroom provides ample opportunities for students to practice their English after having rich input from IDLE exposure. Previous research suggests that students' IDLE engagement enriches the students' vocabulary and improves other skills, including listening and speaking skills (Atmojo, 2022; Lee, 2019a). Moreover, the study affirms that practicing English through peer work increases students' speaking skills (Zega & Hulu, 2022).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

EFL learners' engagement with IDLE activities has been reported to improve students' English proficiency. Moreover, this study found that incorporating IDLE in the speaking classroom impacts students' improvement. It facilitates students'



autonomy to improve speaking skills, promotes practicing speaking, and lowers their anxiety about speaking English. Thus, this study suggests that English teachers should be aware of its benefits and try it out in their classrooms to find out its impact on their students' English proficiency in their context.

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