BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Informal digital learning of English: Research to practice*

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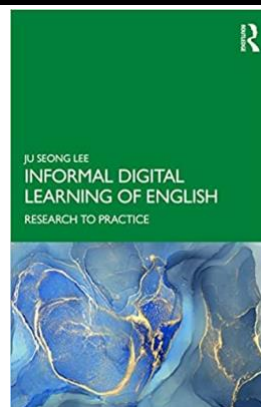
Ju Seong Lee's (2022) *Informal Digital Learning of English: Research to Practice* is essential reading for those who wish to understand this rapidly emerging phenomenon in English-language learning. Understanding how language learners thrive in informal digital environments will help teachers and researchers to use digital social spaces to support specific language learning outcomes. This book, which consists of eight chapters, provides a bridge from cutting-edge research and theory to practice for language practitioners in primary, secondary, and higher education. *Informal Digital Learning of English: Research to Practice* proposes accessible activities anchored in authentic classroom contexts. Over the past two years, many students worldwide have been unable to attend school in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have instead relied on formal and informal online language learning (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). This timely contribution to the field illustrates how informal digital learning of English (IDLE) can transform second language pedagogy. It provides inspirational ideas anchored in sound pedagogy for practitioners.

The book begins with an introduction to IDLE. Subsequent chapters review trends in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) since the 1970s, discuss related concepts, identify learning outcomes, and prepare teachers to implement IDLE in the classroom. Throughout the chapters, Lee integrates theory with numerous practical applications. The conclusion suggests directions for future research and practice. The book aims to be a practical resource for language practitioners, although it is unlikely that all readers will find every section of the book directly relevant to their professional duties or roles.

In the introductory chapter, Lee discusses his motivation for writing the book: the fact that youth around the world are using technology to learn English, especially outside the formal classroom. He seeks to provide a path to sound pedagogical practice in this realm. Lee defines IDLE as "self-directed English activities in informal digital settings, motivated by personal interests and undertaken independently without being assessed by a teacher" (Lee, 2022, p. 1).

In Chapter 2, Lee succinctly discusses the progression of CALL from the 1970s (structural CALL) to the 2010s (ecological CALL). Lee associates these CALL trends with three forms of technology integration: (a) in-class CALL, (b) extracurricular CALL, and (c) extramural CALL. In-class CALL involves the selection of tools and resources (e.g., videos) by language teachers to help students achieve learning

objectives. The resources are supplementary, and the students are passive learners. Extracurricular CALL involves students using technology outside the classroom to complete tasks assigned by their teachers; the students choose the technology (e.g., tablets) and resources (e.g., YouTube) that they will use independently. Similarly, extramural CALL refers to students using technology of their choice (e.g., social media, mobile applications) beyond the classroom for learning, but they take the initiative to do so of their own volition.

In Chapter 3, Lee situates IDLE within CALL by providing a snapshot of published materials (e.g., monographs, edited books, etc.) on the topic. He uses Benson's (2011) four dimensions of out-of-class learning (i.e., formality, location, pedagogy, and locus of control) to define IDLE before discussing its underlying theoretical principles. Lee further suggests that IDLE can be subdivided into extracurricular contexts (e.g., self-directed digital learning linked to formal language programs) and extramural contexts (e.g., self-directed learning independent from formal language programs). He concludes the chapter by helpfully contrasting ten characteristics of IDLE with formal education in English to help the reader understand IDLE principles.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of the concepts of IDLE using Reinders and Benson's (2017) Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom (LBC) as a central framework. LBC can take place both offline and online. Offline LBC includes, for example, informal second-language learning, fully autonomous self-instructed learning, recreational language learning, and extramural English. Online LBC includes CALL in the digital wilds (Sauro & Zourou, 2019), naturalistic CALL (Chik, 2013), informal online learning of English (Cross, 2007; Toffoli & Sockett, 2010), informal online language learning (Isbell, 2018), and out-of-class autonomous language learning using technology (Lai, 2017). Though the chapter succinctly sheds light on recent research trends on the topic, it lacks scenarios to illustrate each method of LBC to help readers understand them on a deeper level.

In Chapter 5, Lee explores the pedagogical advantages of IDLE, including language learning outcomes. The chapter starts with a discussion of the importance of emotion (e.g., attitudes, anxiety) in language learning. Studies have found that IDLE-oriented activities are associated with enjoyment, motivation, grit, and willingness to communicate in the second language (Lai et al., 2015). Furthermore, these affective dimensions correlate with learners' scores on vocabulary and speaking tests. The chapter provides empirical evidence from studies around the globe to support the positive association between emotion, IDLE, and second language acquisition.

Chapter 6 is divided into two sections. The first section covers the use of the three-stage continuum model to allow the use of IDLE in a formal context. Lee proposes integrating IDLE into in-class CALL, extracurricular CALL, and extramural CALL. In the first stage, teachers model CALL activities for their students. Lee suggests doing so via virtual reality programs or WebQuest. In the second stage, teachers gradually assign more responsibility to their students through guided CALL practice. For example, the students might be given a task in class and asked to complete it outside of the classroom using YouTube before being assessed by the teacher. In the final stage, the students are encouraged to independently plan and complete IDLE tasks. The teacher does not organise or evaluate these tasks, unlike those assigned in the second stage. This final stage can be further divided into *weak* (semi-structured; students need explicit instructions) and *strong* (unstructured; 100% learner-initiated) forms of extramural CALL. To make the concepts accessible to readers, Lee provides practical examples of all three stages.

The second section of Chapter 6 focuses on the ways that teachers can support students engaged in IDLE activities. First, the author discusses how teachers can provide affective support for students by recognising, encouraging, and showing interest in their IDLE activities. For example, they can implement sharing sessions or prompt students to describe their activities in detail. Language diaries, interviews, and questionnaires are also introduced as methods for affective support (see Sundqvist & Sylven, 2016). Lee then discusses how teachers can provide cognitive support, for example, by providing resources or tips and answering questions. Finally, he suggests that teachers provide behavioural support by acting as role models and offering concrete ways for students to engage in IDLE activities.

Chapter 7 explores how frontline teachers can integrate IDLE into the classroom. Lee describes how he prepares teachers to do so through 6-hour (one-day) or 30-hour (one-week) workshops. The one-day workshops employ a three-stage process: (a) exposure, (b) critical reflection, and (c) sharing. In the first stage, participants are exposed to the concept of IDLE, how it is situated within CALL and TESOL, and how it is related to language learning outcomes. They are then shown how it is implemented in the classroom using authentic and metacognitive resources. Next, participants are asked to think critically about whether their existing pedagogical practices and materials reflect what interests modern learners and how they learn. Finally, participants share how they engage in IDLE or imagine doing so. Each participant speaks for 3 to 5 minutes. They can describe a tool (e.g., PowerPoint, Book Creator) and/or provide examples of how it can be used in language learning. The one-week workshop comprises five sessions. Session 1 provides an overview of CALL; Sessions 2–4 introduce in-class, extracurricular, and extramural CALL, respectively; the final session presents pedagogical dilemmas. The chapter concludes with feedback from frontline in-service English teachers who have participated in Lee's workshops.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 8, focuses on the challenges faced by English teachers in the 21st century. Lee begins the chapter by introducing three scenarios for the future of English language learning proposed by Godwin-Jones (2019). First, with the rapid development of technology (e.g., artificial intelligence, wearable speech translators), students may no longer feel the need to learn a foreign language. Second, rather than formal instruction, students may learn English informally by watching Netflix or YouTube videos, or playing computer games. Third, students will continue to learn English formally but may supplement formal instruction with informal language learning. Lee thinks that the third option is most likely and that therefore, teachers must embrace new technologies and transform their pedagogical practices to enhance students' language learning.

Lee highlights seven possible directions for future IDLE research and practice, including mixed-methods research and innovative research methods (e.g., language diaries/logs that students complete with their parents, reminders sent via WhatsApp, and discussions of game culture). The author also reminds us that IDLE is still in its infancy. He calls for more action research to advance conceptual and practical understanding.

A strength of *Informal Digital Learning of English: Research to Practice* is that it provides empirically tested activities, pedagogical recommendations, and lesson plans for how language teachers could implement IDLE in their curriculum and teaching practices. Additionally, the robust empirical studies discussed in the book employ a variety of research methodologies to reveal the benefits of IDLE in the context of CALL. The book is particularly informative and valuable for researchers and practitioners interested in experimenting with IDLE approaches in students' daily social spaces and introducing informal digital practices into language learning.

Although this book is relevant to practitioners and researchers, it has a few shortcomings. Some readers might find it too theoretical. The author could have included examples of the use of IDLE with learners of different proficiency levels or various forms of technology (e.g., social media, virtual reality programs, and/or videos). Future editions of this book could include a website with links to online, practice-based resources and serve as a platform for teachers to share their practices and engage in discussions. Instructors need a broader range of activities and step-by-step guidance to employ IDLE in the teaching process. Moreover, each chapter could include a glossary of key terms and end with an annotated list of supplementary reading material in addition to a reference list.

Informal Digital Learning of English: Research to Practice is written in a straightforward style by a leading author in the field. By synthesising seminal works, theories, and pedagogy, Lee explains how both novice and experienced educators can implement IDLE. The chapters are comprehensive, data-rich, relevant, and informative for language teachers and researchers alike. This book is a valuable reference point for understanding IDLE and promoting its advancement.

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