

Sự hài lòng của sinh viên đối với nền tảng tự học tiếng Anh trực tuyến Spark: Kết quả nghiên cứu từ sinh viên không chuyên tại Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát mức độ hài lòng của sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn đối với nền tảng tự học tiếng Anh trực tuyến Spark. Mục tiêu là ghi nhận trải nghiệm thực tế của người học, xác định các yếu tố tác động đến mức độ hài lòng, và cung cấp dữ liệu tham khảo cho cải tiến dạy – học tiếng Anh không chuyên. Nghiên cứu áp dụng tiếp cận định lượng qua khảo sát trực tuyến; các mục đánh giá tập trung vào ba nhóm: tính tiện lợi, thiết kế bài tập, và tính năng hỗ trợ người học. Mẫu gồm 269 sinh viên không chuyên khóa 47. Dữ liệu được phân tích bằng thống kê mô tả (tần suất, tỷ lệ %) kết hợp giá trị trung bình (mean) và độ lệch chuẩn (SD) để phản ánh mức độ hài lòng và độ nhất quán. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên đánh giá cao tính tiện lợi của Spark. Về thiết kế bài tập, người học ghi nhận phù hợp chương trình và trình độ, trình tự logic, đa dạng, hướng dẫn rõ ràng; tuy nhiên cơ chế phản hồi và gợi ý theo bước còn hạn chế. Ở nhóm hỗ trợ người học, Spark giúp ôn tập kiến thức, mở rộng và truy cập nhanh học liệu. Nền tảng cũng thúc đẩy học tập lấy người học làm trung tâm, song cơ hội tương tác và chia sẻ tri thức với giảng viên/bạn học còn thấp. Nhìn chung, Spark đáp ứng tốt nhu cầu tự học của sinh viên, đồng thời gợi ý nâng cấp phản hồi, gợi ý theo bước và tương tác nhằm tối ưu trải nghiệm và kết quả học tập.

Từ khóa: nền tảng Spark, nền tảng tiếng Anh, nền tảng tự học, hài lòng của sinh viên, sinh viên không chuyên

Student Satisfaction with the Spark Online English Self-Study Platform: Evidence from Non-English Majors at Quy Nhon University

ABSTRACT

This study investigates **non-English-major students'** satisfaction with the Spark online English self-study platform at Quy Nhon University. It aims to capture learners' experiences, identify factors shaping satisfaction, and inform improvements in non-English-major English instruction. A quantitative online survey is administered, with items grouped into three dimensions: convenience, exercise design, and learner-support features. The sample comprises 269 Cohort-47 students. Data are analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and means with standard deviations (SD) to reflect both satisfaction levels and response consistency. Findings consistently show high satisfaction with convenience. For exercise design, learners positively rate curriculum alignment, level appropriateness, logical sequencing, task diversity, and instructional clarity; however, feedback mechanisms (instructor/automated) and hint-supported steps are perceived as insufficient. Regarding learner support, Spark facilitates in-class knowledge review, broadens access to practice resources, and enables time-saving retrieval of materials, making study easier. The platform also supports learner-centered learning (interest/engagement, consistent effort, self-directed learning, time management), yet opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing with instructors and peers remain limited. Overall, Spark aligns well with students' self-study needs. To enhance impact, priorities include richer, timely feedback, granular task scaffolding, and lightweight interaction channels to strengthen collaboration and social presence.

Keywords: Spark platform, English platform, self-study platform, non-majors' satisfaction, non-majors

1. INTRODUCTION

Amid the advancement of educational technology and the promotion of student autonomy in learning, online platforms have emerged as indispensable tools for language instruction. These platforms not only support flexible learning environments but also empower students to take greater control of their learning processes. Recognizing this pedagogical shift, the Department of Foreign Languages at Quy Nhon University (QNU) has implemented targeted strategies to enhance students' access to technology-enhanced English learning resources, particularly for **non-English-major students** enrolled in General English courses. One significant improvement was the adoption of the *Voices Pre-intermediate* textbook, authored by Emily Bryson and Christien Lee and published by National Geographic Learning, into the curriculum of English 1 and English 2 during the 2022–2023 academic year. This textbook is complemented by the Spark online English self-study platform, which enhances students' out-of-class learning activities and practice.

The Spark offers exercises, including Reading, Grammar, Pronunciation, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking and Writing. These

activities are assigned by instructors with specific weekly deadlines based on the teaching schedule, ensuring that students complete tasks on time. Students access the Spark platform via the website learn.eltngl.com. They are required to complete assigned exercises on Spark as part of their coursework and as a prerequisite for the final examination, ensuring consistent engagement with the material throughout the semester.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the satisfaction of **non-English-major students** with the Spark platform at QNU and to identify which platform features most effectively support out-of-class learning. The study is driven by the author's instructional commitment to promoting learner autonomy and maximizing the pedagogical value of digital tools in large, mixed-ability classes, while also responding to institutional demands for evidence-based enhancement of blended General English teaching. Accordingly, the study addresses the following questions: Research question 1 (RQ1): To what extent are students satisfied with Spark's convenience, exercise design, and learner-support features? Research question 2 (RQ2): Which features of Spark most strongly facilitate sustained engagement and self-directed

learning beyond classroom hours? Research question 3 (RQ3): What perceived limitations, if any, constrain students' learning experience on the platform?

The scope of the investigation is delimited to **non-English-major students** from Cohort-47 at QNU who used *Voices Pre-intermediate* with Spark during the 2024–2025 academic year. By providing context-specific evidence from a Vietnamese higher-education setting, this study contributes practical insights for course design, platform integration, and assessment policies in blended General English courses. More broadly, it underscores a strategic shift toward learner autonomy, continuous engagement, and personalized learning pathways, aligning English language instruction with global trends in technology-enhanced education and equipping students with the digital literacy and language skills essential for academic and professional success in the 21st century.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual positioning

This study positions learner satisfaction at the intersection of three strands of scholarship: (i) online learner engagement, (ii) learner autonomy, and (iii) technology-enhanced learning design. Engagement comprises behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions and is closely associated with satisfaction when course design, interactional opportunities, and technological usability are well aligned. Autonomy both results from and sustains flexible digital environments in which learners regulate goals, time, and strategies. In blended General English courses for non-English-major students, platform features that lower friction and scaffold self-regulation are expected to strengthen sustained participation out-of-class and, in turn, overall satisfaction.

2.2 Theoretical Lens: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Following Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism, the learning platform and its implementation constitute the "environment" that shapes learners' beliefs, expectations, and strategies; these cognitions then inform behavior (engagement) and affect (satisfaction). Concretely, convenience/usability and stable access reduce extraneous load, clear task design focuses cognitive effort on target skills, and timely guidance/feedback supports strategy adjustment. Accordingly, SCT provides an

explicit logic for linking platform attributes to the study's observed constructs and outcomes.

2.3 Linking Theory to Constructs and Instrument (Theory → Constructs → Items/RQs) — Revised

Grounded in SCT, the survey operationalizes four construct clusters that map directly to the research questions (RQ1–RQ3) and to concrete platform features and learner experiences:

- Convenience/Usability (Environment → Cognition/Behavior): *usability, speed, stability, technical support*. Expectation: higher convenience → stronger perceived usefulness/ease of use → higher engagement and satisfaction. (RQ1)
- Exercise Design (Structured Inputs → Cognitive Engagement): *curriculum alignment, level appropriateness, logical sequencing, task diversity, instructional clarity*. Expectation: better-aligned and clearer tasks → sustained cognitive effort → higher satisfaction. (RQ1)
- Guidance & Feedback (Environmental Contingencies → Strategy Adjustment): *hint-supported steps, instructor feedback, automated feedback*. Expectation: more specific and timely scaffolding/feedback → more effective self-correction → higher engagement and satisfaction. (RQ1/RQ3)
- Learner Support & Learner-Centeredness (Supports for Autonomy): *review support, extra resources, time-saving access, interest/engagement, consistent effort, self-directed learning, time management, interaction/knowledge sharing*. Expectation: richer support and learner-centered affordances → greater self-directed learning and out-of-class participation. (RQ2/RQ3)

This transparent mapping from theory to constructs and items clarifies the study's theoretical framework and removes the conceptual overlap that previously existed between "theoretical background" and "literature review."

2.4 Synthesis of prior research

Studies in higher education consistently indicate that e-learning service quality, coherent course design, and technological usability are

positively associated with learners' engagement and satisfaction (Martin & Bolliger³; Wei & Chou⁵; Aguirre et al.¹⁷; Tran¹⁸; Le et al.¹⁹).

Regarding task and materials design, prior research emphasizes that close curriculum alignment, level appropriateness, logical sequencing, and task diversity help sustain cognitive effort and enhance perceived value (Pratiwi⁹; Pratiwi & Waluyo¹⁰; Choi & Lee¹⁶; Ahmed et al.¹³; Ubaedillah et al.¹⁴).

Technological usability—including ease of operation, speed, stability, and available technical support—functions as a foundational condition that reduces extraneous load and, in turn, increases engagement and satisfaction in online and blended courses (Mahmud¹¹; Clarke & Hermens¹²; Wei & Chou⁵).

Moreover, instructor presence and meaningful interaction opportunities—via timely feedback, academic discussion, and platform-based support—are reported to bolster motivation and improve satisfaction (Martin & Bolliger³; Aguirre et al.¹⁷).

Taken together, existing evidence shows that learner satisfaction in online environments emerges from the multidimensional interplay of pedagogical design, technological/infrastructural quality, and learners' psychological and strategic regulation; this pattern is especially pertinent to General English courses for non-English-major students who require support to extend practice beyond classroom hours (Pratiwi⁹; Pratiwi & Waluyo¹⁰; Ahmed et al.¹³; Ubaedillah et al.¹⁴; Tran¹⁸; Le et al.¹⁹).

2.5 Critical Appraisal and the Research Gap

Despite broad agreement on these associations, much of the literature *remains* descriptive and *under-specifies* platform-level dimensions within authentic course settings. Three limitations frequently appear: (i) a lack of operationalized measures for granular scaffolding (e.g., hint-supported steps) and feedback typologies (instructor vs. automated, error-specificity, timeliness); (ii) limited evidence that ties platform features to concrete course ecologies (textbook alignment, assessment stakes, weekly schedules) where students actually work; and (iii) a scarcity of data from Vietnamese higher education, particularly large blended General English cohorts of non-English-major students, where institutional constraints and learner profiles can shape usability, engagement, and satisfaction in distinctive ways. These gaps justify a *platform-specific, context-bound* evaluation that *quantifies* both the level of satisfaction and the

consistency of responses across clearly defined dimensions.

2.6 Analytical expectations

P1. Higher convenience/usability is associated with higher satisfaction.

P2. Better-aligned and clearer exercise design is associated with higher satisfaction.

P3. More specific and timely guidance/feedback is associated with higher engagement and satisfaction.

P4. Stronger learner support and learner-centered affordances are associated with greater self-directed learning and sustained out-of-class participation.

2.7 Implications for the Present Study

Operationalizing the constructs above allows the instrument to test the propositions in a manner consistent with SCT while speaking directly to course design decisions. By reporting both distributional trends (frequencies/percentages) and central tendency/dispersion (means/SDs), the analysis captures not only how satisfied students are with each dimension but also how consistent their experiences are. This design responds to calls for platform-specific evidence and provides decision-ready insights for optimizing Spark's integration in blended General English for non-English-major students.

3. THE SPARK ONLINE ENGLISH SELF-STUDY PLATFORM AT QUY NHON UNIVERSITY

The Spark online self-study platform is currently adopted at Quy Nhon University (QNU) to support technology-enhanced English learning for **non-English-major students**. Officially introduced into the curriculum in the 2022–2023 academic year, Spark—developed by National Geographic Learning—is aligned with the *Voices Pre-intermediate* textbook and is integrated into the English 1 and English 2 courses across two consecutive semesters. Designed to extend classroom instruction, the platform provides a structured environment in which students review, consolidate, and practice lesson content independently.

Spark offers a comprehensive suite of exercises covering major language skills—Reading, Grammar, Pronunciation, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, and Writing. Each online module corresponds to the relevant unit in the *Voices* textbook, ensuring tight alignment between in-class teaching and out-of-class practice. After attending lessons, students are

required to complete assigned Spark tasks at home according to the weekly teaching schedule. This arrangement reinforces key concepts, supports repeated exposure to language input, and encourages regular, self-directed engagement with course materials.

Importantly, Spark assignments are compulsory and contribute to one graded component of the course assessment. Embedding graded online tasks is intended to promote accountability, sustain continuous learning over both semesters, and foster greater learner autonomy.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Participants

This study involves 269 first-year non-English-major students randomly selected from six intact General English classes in Cohort-47 at QNU. At the time of the survey, all participants have completed English 1 and English 2 during the 2024–2025 academic year, which constituted their first official exposure to Spark online exercises. First-year students are purposefully targeted because General English is a foundational component of the curriculum: although they are not English majors, they are expected to possess essential linguistic knowledge and skills for a meaningful evaluation of the platform. Collecting data immediately after the two first-year courses enables the study to assess not only students' satisfaction with the Spark self-study platform but also whether Spark is genuinely supportive and sufficiently developed for autonomous learning at this early stage.

Participant characteristics

Most participants come from provinces in the South Central Coast (e.g., Bình Định, Phú Yên, Quảng Ngãi) and the Central Highlands (e.g., Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk, Kon Tum), reflecting the typical regional demographic profile of QNU's student population. The cohort includes both male and female students, with a slightly higher proportion of females, which is typical in General English courses at QNU.

Sampling method

Participants are randomly selected from six General English classes to minimize instructor- and class-specific bias. The final sample size ($n = 269$) reflects the number of eligible students who consent and complete the online questionnaire.

Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria are: (i) non-English-major students in Cohort-47; (ii) completion of English 1 and English 2 in academic year 2024–

2025 (first year); (iii) first official exposure to Spark assignments during these courses; and (iv) verified platform access.

Ethical considerations

Participation is voluntary and based on informed consent. The survey is anonymous, and no personally identifying information is collected. Students are informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty and that responses are used solely for research and quality improvement purposes. The study adheres to QNU's research ethics guidelines.

4.2 Research design

This study employs a cross-sectional, single-site, quantitative descriptive design at QNU, with the individual learner (first-year non-English-major, Cohort-47) as the unit of analysis. The design captures current satisfaction levels across constructs aligned to the research questions: (RQ1) satisfaction with convenience and exercise design/learner-support features; (RQ2) features that facilitate sustained engagement and self-directed learning out-of-class; (RQ3) perceived limitations. A 5-point Likert scale enables the reporting of frequencies/percentages alongside means and standard deviations (SDs), reflecting both central tendency and dispersion. This design suits large introductory cohorts and informs immediate platform/course enhancement.

4.3 Research method

A structured online questionnaire comprised: (i) personal information; and (ii) satisfaction scales for convenience, exercise design, and learner support/learner-centered features (Likert 1–5). The instrument was explicitly mapped to the RQs:

RQ1 → items on convenience (usability, fast speed, suitability, stability, technical support); exercise design (curriculum alignment, level appropriateness, logical progression, diversity) and learner support features.

RQ2 → review support, additional resources, time-saving access, learning made easier) and learner-centered facets (interest/engagement, consistent effort, self-directed learning, time management).

RQ3 → difficulties/limitations (limited hints, insufficient instructor/automated feedback, restricted interaction/knowledge sharing, assessment clarity/fairness).

Ethics

The survey link is shared via Zalo with six General English classes; students receive instructions, provide informed consent, and

complete the survey anonymously. Participation **is voluntary** with the right to withdraw; no identifying data **are collected**; the study **complies** with QNU's research-ethics guidelines.

4.4 Data collection and data analysis

A structured questionnaire **is used** to collect data from 269 non-English-major students. The instrument **comprises** two parts: personal information and items measuring students' satisfaction with the Spark online English self-study platform. The satisfaction section **is organized** into four constructs and is explicitly mapped to the study's research questions. Items assessing convenience and exercise design align with RQ1, which examines satisfaction with Spark's convenience, exercise design, and learner-support features. Items on review support, access to additional resources, time-saving functions, and making learning easier link to RQ2, as these features contribute to students' engagement and sustained self-directed learning out-of-class. Questions addressing difficulties, limited interaction, unclear instructions, or insufficient feedback provide evidence for RQ3, which explores perceived constraints in the learning experience.

To ensure accessibility and encourage participation, the survey **is distributed** via Zalo—a widely used communication platform in Vietnam. When the questionnaire link **is shared** in each class group, clear instructions are provided to guide students in completing the survey accurately. Completed responses are automatically recorded through the online system.

Data analysis

The dataset **is cleaned, consolidated, and analyzed** using descriptive statistics to observe trends for each construct. In addition to frequency and percentage, we **compute** the mean and standard deviation for all multi-item indicators to provide a more complete and precise picture of students' satisfaction across convenience, exercise design, learner-support, and learner-centered features. Findings are then interpreted in relation to the research questions and the existing literature, from which several pedagogical implications **are derived** to optimize

the Spark platform and improve the overall learning experience.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first part of the questionnaire was designed for students to indicate their academic major and cohort. At Quy Nhon University, students from cohort 47 had completed the General English course and experienced practice activities through the Spark self-study platform, which is provided by National Geographic Learning. As a result, they were able to form concrete perceptions of the platform's convenience, the relevance and clarity of exercises, the effectiveness of learner support features, and the extent to which the platform embodied learner-centered principles.

5.1. Students' satisfaction with the convenience of the Spark online English self-study platform

To address RQ1 on students' satisfaction with Spark's convenience-related features, we analyze the collected data and present the results in Figure 1. The figure shows a clearly positive overall perception of the platform. For *usability*, 95.1% of respondents agree (52.4%) or strongly agree (42.7%), while only 0.3% strongly disagree, indicating that students can easily operate the platform and access resources seamlessly. This finding aligns with Martin & Bolliger¹¹ on the importance of technological usability.

Similarly, *fast speed* receives 90.3% agreement (50.9% agree; 39.4% strongly agree) with 3.7% disagreement, suggesting responsive system performance. *Suitability for students records* 93.6% agreement (51.3% agree; 42.3% strongly agree), confirming alignment with learners' needs. *System stability* shows 91.0% agreement (50.9% agree; 40.1% strongly agree), reflecting reliable access. Finally, *technical support availability* is rated highly at 92.5% agreement (51.3% agree; 41.2% strongly agree), suggesting effective assistance mechanisms. Taken together, these indicators **corroborate** consistently high satisfaction with Spark's convenience.

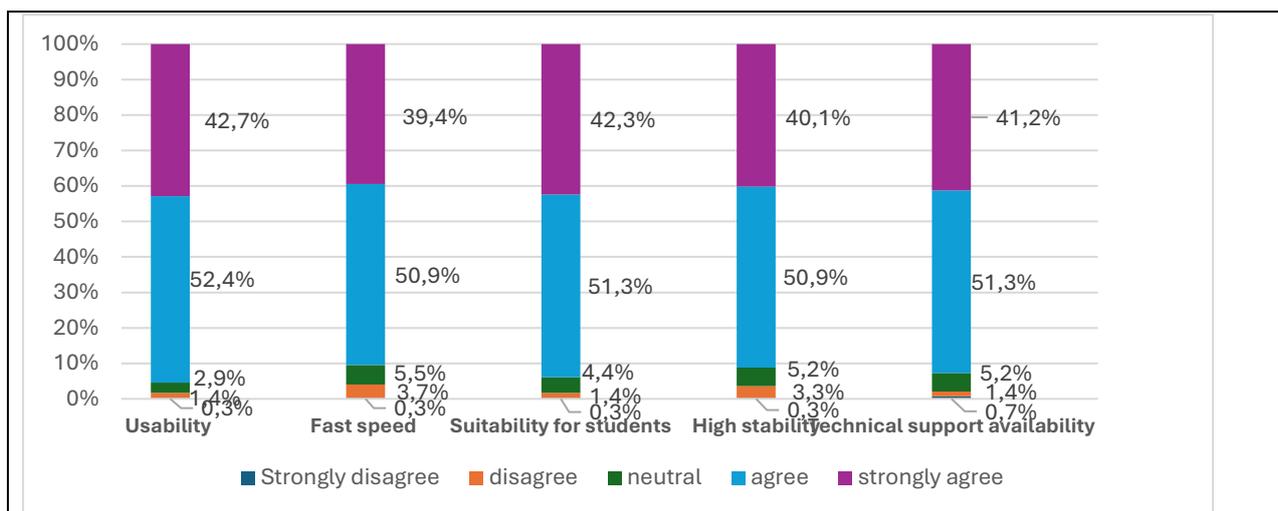


Figure 1: Students' satisfaction with the convenience of the Spark online English self-study platform

In addition to the percentage results presented above, Table 1 below reports the corresponding mean and standard-deviation values for all five convenience indicators. All five convenience indicators achieved high mean

scores ($M = 4.25-4.36$) with low standard deviations ($SD = 0.65-0.75$), confirming both strong satisfaction and a high level of consistency among respondents.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation for convenience indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD
Usability	4.36	0.65
Fast speed	4.25	0.75
Suitability for students	4.36	0.65
High stability	4.27	0.74
Technical support availability	4.31	0.70

Such features make it highly convenient for students to access the platform, fostering a sense of comfort and engagement. A fast, stable, and suitable system enhances user satisfaction and encourages consistent participation in self-directed learning activities. These findings collectively indicate a consistently high level of student satisfaction with the Spark platform, particularly in terms of *usability*, *fast speed suitability for students*, *high stability*, and *technical support availability*, thereby affirming its effectiveness and suitability as a digital learning environment aligned with learners' expectations and academic needs. The results align with Pratiwi & Waluyo²'s assertion that e-learning technologies promote autonomous learning and better outcomes by providing flexible digital environments that support independent strategy use and academic achievement.

5.2. Students' satisfaction with the exercises provided on the Spark online English self-study platform

To examine students' satisfaction with Spark's exercise design (RQ1), we **analyze** items on curriculum alignment, level appropriateness, logical sequencing, diversity, and instructional clarity; the results are summarized in Table 2.

The data in the table reveal high student satisfaction with most aspects of exercises on the Spark Platform. *Curriculum alignment* (94.7% agree/strongly agree), *level appropriateness* (88%), *logical progression* (92.1%), *diversity* (93.2%) and *instructional clarity* (88.7%) **receive** overwhelmingly positive ratings. These high satisfaction rates suggest that the exercises on Spark are well-structured. The strong agreement on *curriculum alignment* and *logical progression* indicates that students find the content relevant and coherently organized. High ratings for *diversity* and *instructional clarity* reflect Spark's ability to engage learners and support

independent study, while *level appropriateness* ensures tasks are suitably challenging without being overwhelming. This is consistent with Choi and Lee¹⁶, who emphasize that well-designed

activities enables learners to access relevant and authentic content -echoing students' strong satisfaction with Spark's exercise structure.

Table 2. Students' satisfaction with the exercises on the Spark online English self-study platform

Scale Exercises	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Number of students	Percentage								
Curriculum alignment	2	0.7	6	2.2	6	2.2	169	62.8	86	31.9
Level appropriateness	3	1.1	12	4.4	17	6.3	149	55.3%	88	32.7
Logical progression	2	0.7	8	2.9	11	4.0	158	58.7	90	33.4
Diversity	1	0.3	4	1.4	13	4.8	160	59.4	91	33.8
Instructional clarity	5	1.8	11	4	14	5.2	150	55.7	89	33
Hint-supported steps	24	8.9	149	55.3	8	2.9	48	17.8	40	14.8
Instructor feedback	43	15.9	162	60.2	5	1.8	33	12.2	26	9.6
Automated feedback	43	15.9	170	63.1	4	1.4	28	10.4	24	8.9
Fair and reasonable assessment	18	6.6	52	19.3	25	9.2	106	39.4	68	25.2

To supplement the percentage results, mean and standard-deviation values are computed for all exercise-related indicators in Table 3. High-performing items such as curriculum alignment, diversity, logical progression, and instructional clarity yielded high mean scores ($M = 4.14\text{--}4.25$) with relatively low standard

deviations ($SD = 0.65\text{--}0.83$), reaffirming consistent satisfaction among respondents. In contrast, *hint-supported steps*, *instructor feedback*, and *automated feedback* show markedly lower means ($M = 2.33\text{--}2.74$) and higher variability, indicating persistent gaps in guidance and corrective support.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation for exercise-related indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD
Curriculum alignment	4.23	0.67
Level appropriateness	4.14	0.81
Logical progression	4.21	0.72
Diversity	4.25	0.65
Instructional clarity	4.14	0.83
Hint-supported steps	2.74	1.27
Instructor feedback	2.39	1.18
Automated feedback	2.33	1.13
Fair and reasonable assessment	3.57	1.24

However, the proportion of students disagreeing with *hint-supported steps* is relatively high at 64.2%, indicating that learners face difficulties when completing exercises and strongly need detailed, step-by-step guidance. Regarding feedback mechanisms, both *instructor feedback* and *automated feedback* received over 75% disagreement, highlighting a serious lack of interaction and corrective input for students to improve their work. Additionally, *fair and reasonable assessment* achieved moderate approval (64.6%), yet nearly 26% of respondents remained neutral or disagreed.

The survey results confirm a high level of student satisfaction with the overall exercise design on the Spark platform. Nevertheless, areas such as hint-supported steps, feedback mechanisms, and assessment clarity require further enhancement to better facilitate learner progress and promote more effective, interactive learning experiences. Providing structured hints may reduce confusion during task completion, while timely feedback can help learners identify strengths and address weaknesses. Additionally, a fair assessment system is essential for fostering learner trust and sustaining motivation throughout the learning process.

5.3. Students' satisfaction regarding learner support features in the Spark online English self-study platform

To address RQ2 on Spark's learner-support features, we analyze the relevant data and summarize the results in Figure 2. As shown in the figure, students express strong overall satisfaction with the platform's learner-support features. For *reviewing in-class knowledge*, 61.3% agree and 34.2% strongly agree, indicating that most students find this function helpful for reinforcing lessons. Similarly, 59.8% agree and 35.3% strongly agree that the platform provides *additional practice resources*. This is particularly significant because students often face an overwhelming volume of online materials; by offering curated, curriculum-aligned resources, the platform reduces confusion and enables focused practice, which can improve learning outcomes. Regarding *time-saving access to materials*, 56.8% agree and 35.3% strongly agree; the slightly higher neutrality (5.5%) suggests room for optimization. Finally, 91.4% of respondents confirm that the platform makes learning easier, highlighting its role in supporting autonomous and self-directed learning. These findings are consistent with Sadaghian & Marandi¹⁵, who note that digital environments afford abundant, authentic learning opportunities, and with Ahmed et al.¹³, who show that resources such as websites, videos, online lectures, e-books, and interactive programs motivate learners, save time and effort, bring authentic English into the learning process, and foster autonomy and self-directed learning.

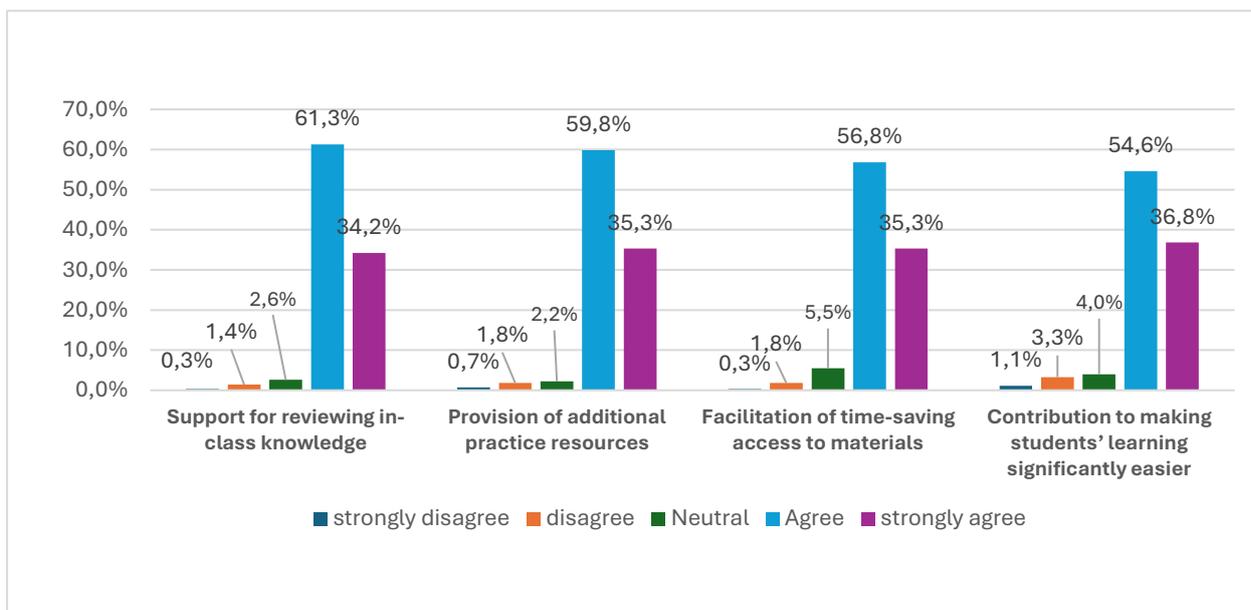


Figure 2: Students' satisfaction regarding learner support features in the Spark online English self-study platform

To supplement the percentage trends, mean and standard-deviation values were examined in Table 4. All four indicators show high mean scores ($M = 4.23-4.28$) with relatively low SD values ($0.62-0.77$), reflecting strong consensus

among respondents. These results further confirm that Spark's learner-support features effectively reinforce in-class knowledge, expand practice opportunities, and make independent learning more manageable.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation for learner support features

Indicator	Mean	SD
Support for reviewing in-class knowledge	4.28	0.62
Provision of additional practice resources	4.27	0.67
Facilitation of time-saving access to materials	4.25	0.67
Contribution to making students' learning significantly easier	4.23	0.77

Therefore, the Spark platform at QNU can serve as a valuable tool to help students access digital resources, enhance independent learning habits, and build confidence in using English in real-world contexts.

5.4. Students' satisfaction regarding learner-centered aspects of the Spark online English self-study platform

To address RQ2 on Spark's learner-centered features and their contribution to engagement and self-directed learning, we analyze the relevant items and summarize the key findings in Figure 3. As shown in the data, students express strong overall satisfaction with Spark's learner-centered functions. For enhancing interest and engagement, 57.6% agree and 33.4% strongly agree, confirming the platform's role in motivating learners. Similarly, for supporting consistent effort, 55.7% agree and 35.3%

strongly agree, indicating that Spark helps sustain learners' effort and commitment to the subject. For fostering awareness of self-directed learning, 56.1% agree and 34.2% strongly agree, emphasizing Spark's contribution to learner autonomy.

However, opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing score noticeably lower, with only 28.9% agree and 18.2% strongly agree, while 37.9% disagree. Consistent with Martin & Bolliger³—who highlight the influence of instructor presence and interaction on online-learning satisfaction—this gap suggests limited collaborative affordances that may hinder peer- and instructor-level engagement. Finally, 56.5% agree and 31.9% strongly agree that the platform helps them manage study time effectively; this aligns with Ubaedillah & Pratiwi¹⁴, who note that online platforms offer

flexible access that enables anytime study, deeper reflection, and more time-efficient

management—particularly valuable for students with busy schedules.

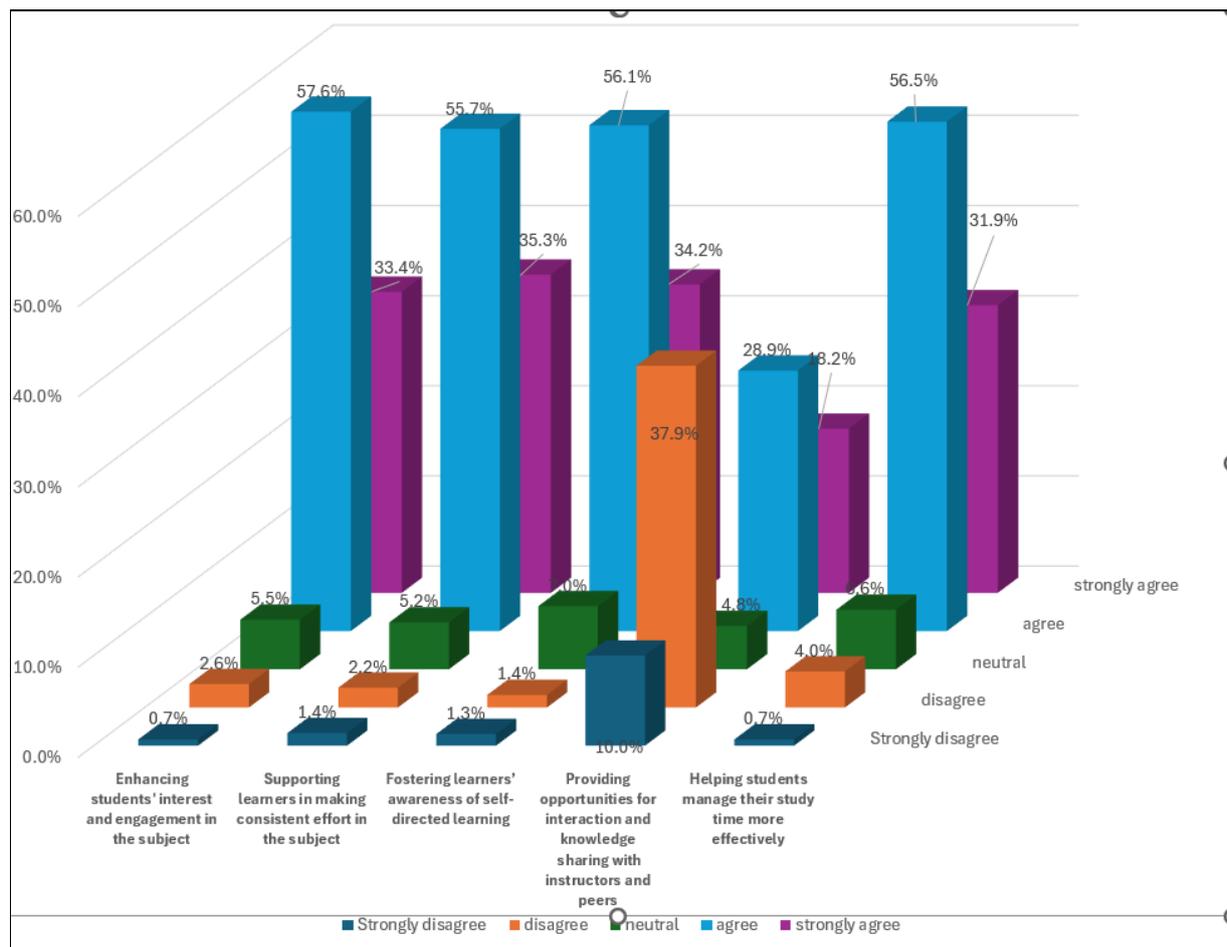


Figure 3: Students' satisfaction regarding learner-centered aspects of the Spark online English self-study platform

To supplement these percentage trends, mean and standard-deviation values are also examined in Table 5. All indicators related to motivation, consistent effort, self-directed learning, and time management achieve high mean scores ($M = 4.15-4.21$) with relatively low SDs values ($0.72-$

0.77), confirming strong agreement and consistent satisfaction among respondents. In contrast, interaction and knowledge-sharing opportunities show a much lower mean ($M = 3.07$) and the highest SD (1.34), highlighting a clear weakness in Spark's learner-centered design.

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation for learner-centered indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD
1. Enhancing students' interest and engagement in the subject	4.20	0.72
2. Supporting learners in making consistent effort in the subject	4.21	0.76
3. Fostering learners' awareness of self-directed learning	4.21	0.73
4. Providing opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing with instructors and peers	3.07	1.34
5. Helping students manage their study time more effectively	4.15	0.77

Therefore, the Spark platform at QNU can serve as a valuable tool to help students access digital resources, enhance independent learning habits, and build confidence in using English in real-world contexts.

5.5 Perceived limitations of the Spark online English self-study platform

To address RQ3—*what perceived limitations constrain students' learning experience on the platform*—we examine items that receive comparatively lower satisfaction scores and/or greater dispersion. The analysis indicates four salient constraints: (i) task guidance (hint-supported steps), (ii) feedback mechanisms (instructor and automated feedback), (iii) interaction/knowledge-sharing, and (iv) assessment clarity.

(i) Task guidance (hint-supported steps)

Despite generally positive views of exercise design (Section 5.2), *hint-supported steps* receive the weakest ratings: 64.2% of students disagreed/strongly disagreed and the indicator *shows* a low mean with high variability ($M = 2.74$; $SD = 1.27$). This suggests many learners lack the step-by-step scaffolding needed to complete tasks confidently in self-study settings.

(ii) Feedback mechanisms

Both *instructor feedback* and *automated feedback record* the lowest satisfaction among exercise-related indicators (disagreement > 75%), with correspondingly low means and wide dispersion (instructor feedback: $M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.18$; automated feedback: $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.13$). Limited, delayed, or generic feedback likely reduces opportunities for error correction and strategy adjustment.

(iii) Interaction and knowledge sharing

Learner-centered results (Section 5.4) reveal a marked shortfall in *opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing with instructors and peers*: only 47.1% agreed/strongly agreed while 37.9% disagreed. The mean *is* the lowest in the learner-centered set and exhibited the greatest variability ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 1.34$), indicating substantial divergence across classes/cohorts. Insufficient collaborative affordances may reduce social presence and hinder sustained engagement.

(iv) Assessment clarity/fairness

Fair and reasonable assessment *show* a mid-range profile (approval 64.6%; $M = 3.57$; $SD = 1.24$). Although not as weak as guidance/feedback/interaction, the sizable neutral/disagreeing segment (~26%) signals that criteria, rubrics, or alignment between task

demands and grading require clearer communication.

Implications

Taken together, these findings indicate that Spark's principal constraints lie less in *content* or *technical performance* and more in *process supports* that sustain autonomous work—namely, granular guidance, timely and actionable feedback, and meaningful interaction. Targeted improvements could include: (1) embedding optional, step-by-step hints with worked examples; (2) enhancing automated feedback to reference specific errors and strategies; (3) integrating lightweight Q&A/peer-discussion threads tied to tasks and scheduling instructor touchpoints; and (4) clarifying rubrics, criteria, and exemplars to strengthen perceptions of fairness and transparency.

Brief conclusion (RQ3) While Spark performs strongly on usability and the overall structure of exercises, perceived limitations in guided support, feedback, interaction, and assessment clarity constrain the learning experience for a non-trivial share of first-year *non-English-major students*. Addressing these gaps is likely to raise engagement and satisfaction further, particularly for learners undertaking self-study out-of-class.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Spark online self-study platform demonstrates several notable strengths, meeting the expectations of modern digital learning and aligning well with students' needs. First, the system is highly valued for being easy to use, fast, suitable for learners, and stable, with accessible technical assistance, ensuring a seamless learning experience with minimal disruptions. Moreover, students report strong satisfaction with the quality of exercises, reflected in curricular alignment, level appropriateness, logical organization, and task diversity, all of which contribute to improved knowledge acquisition. Beyond delivering learning content, Spark adds significant value by fostering essential learning skills. Specifically, the platform enhances interest and engagement, supports learners in maintaining consistent effort, promotes awareness of self-directed learning, and enables effective study-time management. These advantages indicate that Spark is not merely a supportive tool but a comprehensive learning environment that cultivates proactive and sustainable learning habits among students. These conclusions synthesize findings from Sections 5.1–5.4, where high agreement rates and

high means with low standard deviations confirm consistently positive satisfaction across convenience, exercise design, and learner-support/learner-centered features.

In addition, the study highlights Spark’s role in fostering learner autonomy in English learning. Students report that the platform enables them to review in-class knowledge independently, access supplementary resources beyond scheduled lessons, and manage study time more effectively. These features encourage consistent effort, goal setting, and progress monitoring, thereby cultivating self-directed learning habits. By supporting autonomy, Spark empowers **non-English-major students** to take greater responsibility for their learning out-of-class, reinforcing engagement and sustained participation.

Despite its strengths, Spark still faces challenges that limit its potential as a fully interactive learning environment. Specifically, the analysis in Sections 5.2 and 5.4 (summarized in 5.5) shows the lowest satisfaction for hint-supported steps and for both instructor and automated feedback, as well as weaker perceptions of interaction and knowledge-sharing, with assessment clarity/fairness only at a mid-range level. The lack of effective communication channels and collaborative tools reduces opportunities for peer interaction and instructor engagement, which are essential for social learning and timely feedback. Similarly,

feedback mechanisms within exercises remain underdeveloped, leaving students without adequate guidance to correct mistakes or improve performance. The absence of detailed, step-by-step hints in complex tasks increases cognitive load, making learning less efficient. In addition, perceptions of assessment fairness and transparency are mixed, indicating a need to clarify criteria and rubrics.

To address these issues, Spark should integrate interactive features such as discussion forums, real-time messaging, and virtual office hours to strengthen collaboration. Enhancing feedback systems with personalized, constructive responses and incorporating step-by-step hints for challenging exercises would provide clearer learning pathways. Complementarily, embedding richer automated feedback (e.g., error-specific explanations and strategy prompts) can support immediate correction during self-study.

Additionally, refining assessment practices to ensure fairness and transparency will build trust and confidence among learners. Taken together, these recommendations directly target the limitations identified for RQ3 and, if implemented, are likely to further strengthen the positive outcomes evidenced for RQ1–RQ2 (engagement, autonomy, and sustained participation). These improvements would transform Spark into a more engaging, supportive, and effective platform.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Student Satisfaction with the Spark Online English Self-Study Platform: Evidence from Non-English Majors at Quy Nhon University

1. Students’ satisfaction with the convenience of the Spark online English self-study platform

1. Usability
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
2. Fast speed
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
3. Suitability for students
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
4. High stability
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
5. Technical support availability
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

2. Students’ satisfaction with the exercises provided on the Spark online English self-study platform

1. Curriculum alignment
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
2. Level appropriateness
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
3. Logical progression
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
4. Diversity
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
5. Instructional clarity
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
6. Hint-supported steps
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
7. Instructor feedback
 - strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree
8. Automated feedback

- strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
9. Fair and reasonable assessment
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree

3. Students' satisfaction regarding learner support features in the Spark online English self-study platform

1. Support for reviewing in-class knowledge
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
2. Provision of additional practice resources
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
3. Facilitation of time-saving access to materials
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
4. Contribution to making students' learning significantly easier
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree

4. Students' satisfaction regarding learner-centered aspects of the Spark online English self-study platform

1. Enhancing students' interest and engagement in the subject
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
2. Supporting learners in making consistent effort in the subject
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
3. Fostering learners' awareness of self-directed learning
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
4. Providing opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing with instructors and peers
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree
5. Helping students manage their study time more effectively
 strongly disagree disagree neutral
 agree strongly agree

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