"Almost like having my own teacher beside me": A Learner's Investment in Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and English-medium Instruction (EMI) Learning

Sam Junwei Liao
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Fan Fang*
Shantou University, China

Xiao Cao
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Wenjun Wang
Cleveland State University, USA

Abstract

This study investigates how a first-year undergraduate student (Emma) in a Chinese English-medium instruction (EMI) university invests in *Informal Digital Learning of English* (IDLE) and EMI academic subjects learning outside classrooms through digital learning resources, including AI (artificial intelligence) tools. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) Model of Investment, this study examines the interplay between the EMI context and the student's ideologies, identity, and capital in shaping her learning practices through a semi-structured interview. Findings indicate that Emma's positive attitudes towards English and technology, identity as a long-term yet strategically-motivated English learner, and economic, social, and cultural capital shape her investment in using digital resources for learning L2 (IDLE) and EMI subjects. These tools help to enhance her language proficiency and academic performance, though challenges such as academic integrity concerns and spatial constraints for speaking practice emerge. The study highlights IDLE's transformative potential in EMI settings, offering practical implications for fostering learner autonomy through digital technologies and emphasizing the need for institutional support and ethical guidelines in AI use.

*Corresponding author. Email: ffang@stu.edu.cn

1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, digital resources have been increasingly generated, developed and accessed to improve L2 (second language) learners' language learning and acquisition. Beyond formal classrooms, Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) is researched as a cutting-edge field in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Lee & Drajati, 2019; Soyoof et al., 2023). IDLE refers to 'self-directed, informal English learning using a range of different digital devices (e.g. smartphones and desktop computers) and resources (e.g. web apps and social media), (Lee, 2019, p. 768) outside formal educational settings, such as formal L2 classrooms. Students may also use digital tools (e.g. vocabulary apps and AI tools) for activities related to formal L2 education after school. This approach enables digital technologies to enhance students' L2 learning through their personal interests and informal contexts to maximise language learning and use in daily contexts.

In recent research, learners' use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in informal digital learning of English (also known as AI-IDLE or AI-mediated IDLE) is investigated and analysed as an emerging type of IDLE (Guan et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). AI-IDLE, where learners engage with AI tools to enhance their language skills autonomously, has transformed language learning and teaching, offering new dimensions to IDLE practices. AI-IDLE is often utilised by L2 learners as personal tutors and conversation partners, where they creatively use AI chatbots for tasks such as obtaining grammar explanations for difficult texts and practising for L2 speaking exams (e.g. TOEFL) (Liu et al., 2024).

In general, IDLE (including AI-IDLE) has taken more space, time and significance in students' L2 learning activities and is indeed crucial in their L2 acquisition (Lee, 2021; Kiaer & Lo, 2025). As AI-IDLE emerges and evolves at a fast pace in various contexts (Liu et al., 2025b), there is a need for research to examine individual differences in IDLE, particularly in AI-IDLE, which will help contribute essential knowledge to the fields of AI-IDLE and second language acquisition (SLA) (Liu et al., 2025a).

English-medium instruction (EMI) is an instructional approach where English is used to teach and access academic subjects in regions where English is not the first language (L1) for most of the population (Macaro et al., 2018). More recently, EMI in Chinese higher education has developed rapidly with two explicit pedagogical aims: improving students' English language proficiency while developing their academic/subject knowledge and skills (Liao et al., 2025). Institutional (meso-level) ideological forces influence individuals' (micro-level) perspectives and actions (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). However, there were several challenges in China's tertiary EMI programmes, such as limited student L2 competence, insufficient English input and reduced opportunities for interaction (Liao et al., 2025).

Therefore, investigating how IDLE has been managed in China's EMI education is significant to provide knowledge and insights into the field and stakeholders, as it is beneficial to a large number of students in China's tertiary EMI programmes. As such, EMI universities in China are a novel and rich research site for exploring the country's tertiary EMI.

EMI subjects are academic subjects managed using the EMI approach (instructed and assessed in English) where most students' first language is not English. Likewise, EMI universities are a type of educational context where academic subjects are all taught and assessed in English. Conducted at a university in China, this research aims to investigate how higher education through EMI shapes students' language ideologies, identities and capital, which are all interrelated in terms of investment in IDLE and AI-IDLE (Darvin & Norton, 2015). It also aims to further unpack the theoretical framework of investment into further studies to better understand the complexity of language learning from a sociocultural perspective.

2 Literature review

2.1 Informal Digital Learning of English

Recent studies have highlighted the growing relevance of IDLE in different cultural contexts, showcasing its potential to enhance linguistic proficiency and affective learning gains (Liu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). L2 learners who actively engage in IDLE were found to have enhanced performance in L2 tests and improved L2 skills in listening, reading and speaking (Lee, 2021; Liu et al., 2025a; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012).

Based on a scoping review, recent empirical studies indicate that informal learning environments play a crucial role in enhancing students' L2 development (see Soyoof et al., 2023). IDLE encompasses various leisure-related digital practices, such as online gaming and social media engagement, which contribute to language learning (Liu et al., 2024). Empirical studies also demonstrate that some AI technologies like chatbots' linguistic accuracy and human-like capabilities, positively impact L2 learners' motivation and confidence in English learning (Ebadi & Amini, 2024) and positively influence their perceived usefulness, acceptance and practices of AI-IDLE (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022). Specifically, AI technologies, including ChatGPT and BingChat, facilitate dialogic exchanges, providing instant feedback and personalised learning experiences (Liu et al., 2024). ChatGPT, an AI-based system, is one of the most popular AI tools that has emerged as a significant tool in higher education since its launch in 2022. As an AI chatbot, ChatGPT is designed to mimic human-like communication, enabling it to assist users in various tasks, including answering questions, crafting emails, writing essays and generating software code. It is noteworthy that the rapid adoption of ChatGPT in educational settings has sparked considerable interest as well as debate among educators and researchers. Specific to English language education, however, learners are willing to adopt AI for diverse informal digital learning activities, indicating a shift towards more autonomous learning strategies (Liu et al., 2024). Its ability to provide comprehensive and articulate responses has made it a valuable resource for students and teachers alike.

ChatGPT can serve as an educational aid to respond to students' inquiries, offer feedback and facilitate virtual discussions. Such functions position AI tools as a potential game-changer in enhancing students' learning experiences and supporting academic activities (Soyoof et al., 2025). In addition, the perceived affordance, ease of use and usefulness of digital tools influence their investment in L2 and EMI subjects learning (Liu et al., 2024). In the context of EMI universities, challenges such as limited English proficiency (Liao et al., 2025) require learners to seek additional learning opportunities beyond the classroom. IDLE, including the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, thus becomes a significant form of investment as a way for students to actively navigate linguistic demands, access resources and enhance their communicative competence in pursuit of EMI success.

2.2 The model of investment

The concept of *investment* in language learning is defined as learners' 'commitment to the goals, practices, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different relation of powers' (Darvin, 2019, p. 245). It refers to learners' commitment, involvement and participation in language learning practices to acquire more symbolic and material resources, increasing the value of their economic, social and cultural capital (Darvin & Norton, 2017, 2023; Norton, 2013). Darvin and Norton (2017) further emphasise that the concept of investment 'represents the historically and socially constructed commitment of learners to language learning' (p. 1). Learners' investment transcends the notion of motivation. A learner may resist opportunities to learn and use a certain language, although he or she is highly motivated, in contexts where they feel marginalised (e.g. homophobic, racist or sexist classrooms) (Darvin & Norton, 2017, 2023).

Darvin and Norton ([2015](#)) conceptualise investment in language learning as a multifaceted construct that goes beyond motivation. As indicated in Figure 1, a learner's investment in language learning is understood as the interplay of *identity*, *ideology* and *capital* (economic/material, cultural and social) (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Economic capital includes material resources such as property and salary (i.e. what they have); cultural capital can be knowledge or educational credentials (i.e. what they know); and social capital refers to social status and networks (i.e. who they know) (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Iikkanen, 2022). These three constructs are not only 'factors' and 'variables' but also 'conditions' for a communicative or language learning event (Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Figure 1

Darvin and Norton's 2015 Model of Learner's Investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015)

To illustrate, investment is influenced by learners' L2 ideologies, such as their personal aspirations and the perceived value of the language in achieving future goals. L2 ideology illustrates the way by which power operates to affect learners' learning practices and identity construction based on their beliefs and perceptions (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023). In addition to language ideology, this model investigates 'how multiple ideologies as a complex and layered space of a normative set of competing, dominant, residual, and marginal ideas operate' (Zhang & Huang, 2024, p. 2).

Furthermore, investment is 'always discussed alongside identity' because 'they are woven together by the same epistemological thread' (Darvin & Norton, 2023, p. 31). In L2 investment, identity is 'how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' (Norton, 2013, p. 45). Learners' L2 investment is influenced by their identities as language users and the linguistic or cultural capital they bring to the learning process (Cutrim Schmid, 2022). In L2 education, learners' community often affects their self-perceived identity (Fang et al., 2023; Teng, 2019). Learners with a positive identity tend to invest more commitment, engagement and participation in L2 learning, and vice versa; however, learners' L2 investment can also reversely shape their identities (Teng, 2019).

Under the impact of diverse capital factors, learners invest in an L2 because they hope it will provide a wider range of material and symbolic resources that increase the value of their cultural and social capital, such as access to the target language community (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Norton, 2013). For instance, learners' investment in L2 learning depends on the current material capital (resources) they already have (e.g. access to L2 learning communities and learning resources) and the future/ expected capital/resource they hope to obtain (e.g. access to higher salary or international education/ job opportunities). Learners' symbolic capital, including linguistic and cultural resources (e.g. their prior knowledge, home literacies and mother tongues), greatly impacts their investment in language learning (Teng, 2019).

These three constructs—ideology, identity and capital—are always interrelated to each other. Leaners' investment is influenced by their perceptions of affordances and benefits for the self (ideologies and capital) or perceived action possibilities (ideologies and capital) (Teng, 2019). L2 learners often view English language proficiency as a form of symbolic capital that can enhance their social mobility and economic opportunities (Soltanian & Ghapanchi, 2021; Xue, 2022). In the era of global mobility, learners navigate their L2 learning with complex ideologies influencing their identities and negotiable capital. They invest in L2 learning by assembling their various (semiotic, linguistic and cultural) capital when asserting their identities and rights under their dynamic ideologies (Darvin & Norton, 2023). In summary, learners' investment in target language practices is always dynamic and non-linear. While shaped by how they negotiate identity and access to resources (i.e., capital) across ideological spaces, their assertion of a legitimate status as L2 learners in different contexts can open up new possibilities for identity construction, capital accumulation, and the navigation of ideological structures.

2.3 Empirical studies investigating L2 learners' investment using the Learner Investment Model

Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of language investment has been acknowledged with great significance and utilised as the theoretical basis in several empirical studies (Iikkanen, 2022; Tajeddin et al., 2023; Teng, 2019; Zhang & Huang, 2024). Most of the studies have focused on the relationship of investment between its one or two constructs (e.g. the relationship between investment, ideology and identity).

For instance, Iikkanen (2022) conducted a longitudinal study exploring the Finnish language learning investment of two migrant women in Finland over a three-year period. Using a narrative approach (i.e. the short story approach) and informed by the theoretical framework of *investment* (Darvin & Norton, 2015), the research examines how they invested in language learning to enhance their professional opportunities and family well-being. The findings show that the two language learners invested differently in the English language and Finnish language to enhance their social and cultural capital while contributing to migrant employment opportunities, achieving personal satisfaction and professional integration. Overall, both Finnish learners viewed language learning as an investment in their future capital, yielding professional opportunities, success and social status.

Another empirical study focused on one individual's identity and L2 investment. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model, Zhang and Huang (2024) conducted a longitudinal qualitative case study investigating the evolving identity and investment of Miranda, a pre-service teacher and also a multilingual learner, across three distinct English learning contexts over 7 years. The results indicate that Miranda's investment as an English learner and teacher evolved distinctly in each context, shaped by personal, social and contextual factors. This research enriches the understanding of how context shapes a person's L2 investment and identity as a language learner and advocates for nuanced support in teacher education.

In a similar vein, Liu (2025) explored how rural migrant students in China leverage digital tools to enhance their English learning and assert their 'right to speak' in urban university contexts. The study focuses on two male Chinese English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners using a connective ethnographic approach grounded in Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model. The findings illustrate that Xing and Jimmy, despite initial marginalisation, used digital literacies to empower themselves as legitimate English speakers. Engaging in digital wilds, they negotiated their identities and capital, challenging urban exclusionary ideologies to claim their right to speak. The findings underscore the potential of digital tools to create equitable learning opportunities for rural migrant students in China's higher education system, calling for further research and action to support such learners in this digital age.

Teng (2019) also conducted research investigating the relationship between Chinese English learners' identity and their L2 investment. The results indicate that L2 learners' ideologies and capital influence their learner identities. Their identities directly shape their investment in L2, and vice versa. Similarly, Liu and Darvin (2024) represented L2 learners who adopted digital resources to overcome barriers rooted in their rural backgrounds, negotiate their identities and claim legitimacy as English users.

As described above, many previous studies have demonstrated that contexts impose great influence on L2 learners' ideologies, identities and capital, which are all interrelated to each other and have significant impacts on learners' L2 investment. As EMI emphasises the essence of English language competence and creates a highly immersive English language environment, EMI educational settings have great potential to maximise students' L2 investment. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of learner's investment, this research aims to answer the following research question (RQ):

> **RQ:** How does an undergraduate in an EMI university in China invest in IDLE and EMI subjects learning?

3 Methodology

3.1 Setting and the participant

In China, EMI has been officially recognised and promoted by the macro-level policies since 2005 to facilitate the country's internationalisation and English language teaching in higher education, bringing an 'EMI turn' in tertiary institutions (Liao et al., 2025). The two explicit pedagogical goals in the country's EMI universities have been to teach students academic (subject) knowledge and improve their L2 (English) proficiency (Hu, 2019; Jiang et al., 2019; Liao et al., 2025). Transnational universities in China began in the mid-2000s; however, their rapid expansion became evident only from 2010 onwards (Liao et al., 2025; Lockett et al., 2021). Transnational universities are operated by two educational systems (e.g. the UK and China), which include Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and New York University Shanghai. Compared with EMI in China's conventional universities, transnational universities provide more full-immersion EMI courses, L2 benchmarks for students, L2 support courses and resources and international (inbound) students and overseas exchange opportunities (Lockett et al., 2021; McKinley et al., 2023).

This research was conducted in a Chinese transnational EMI university offering EMI at the tertiary level. The participant, Emma, studied at a transnational university located in an eastern coastal city known for its economic development and international outlook. The university was jointly set up and managed by two parental universities: one from China and the other from the UK. The university is dedicated to establishing itself as a research-led international university, seamlessly integrating Eastern and Western academic traditions, and uses EMI as the instructional approach. Compared with most Chinese conventional universities' EMI programmes, the transnational university has enacted more explicit EMI policies, has provided entire EMI courses (all academic courses are managed as EMI) and has more English language support for students (Rose et al., 2020).

In the focal university, the English language is significant as the stakeholders (i.e. institutional policymakers, EMI subject teachers, English language instructors and students) hope to improve learners' English language competence while teaching or learning academic subjects. EMI and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (as L2 courses) are two types of compulsory courses in the university's Year-1 curricula. In fact, the EAP curriculum is a compulsory course for all Year-1 undergraduates at the university as a critical support to their EMI subject study. In the EAP courses, language instructors attached great importance to teaching students academic English norms and improving their academic English competence in searching and reading academic materials, conducting oral presentations,

discussions and academic writing. As such, EAP learning is a crucial part of students' L2 learning in the focal EMI university, together with content/subject (EMI) courses, as a key aspect of students' IDLE.

3.2 Data collection

The data was collected based on the theoretical framework of Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. First, we distributed a survey to the class asking them about their previous IDLE and AI learning experiences. From the several responses, the survey response of one student, Emma, caught our attention because it revealed her positive attitudes towards English learning and a high level of engagement with digital and AI tools through IDLE, coupled with a unique negotiation of her identity as a language learner. In order to delve into her case from a more comprehensive perspective, this paper adopted a single case study to investigate a learner's L2 investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Emma was in her late second semester (Year 1) of an undergraduate programme, majoring in English Studies in Global Context. This implied her high interest in the English language and expected higher English language competence than her peers in science and engineering. Her academic programme, which focuses on global English communication and intercultural competence, is fully delivered in English. Emma's strong interest in English learning and voluntary participation in this study made her a relevant and information-rich case for exploring learners' engagement with EMI, IDLE and AI-mediated language learning. From the perspective of investment theory (Darvin & Norton, 2015), Emma's choice of major and active pursuit of English-related opportunities reflects her desire to acquire linguistic and symbolic capital and to construct a globally oriented identity.

At the beginning of the first semester, an English diagnostic test was arranged by the university's language centre to determine new undergraduates' English proficiency. Emma's English competence was diagnosed as 'pre-intermediate', which is equal to the A2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference. EAP courses are compulsory for students from the first semester, taking 10 hours per week. Emma has more than 10 years of English learning experience and one semester of EMI and EAP learning experience. As a domestic Chinese student, during high school, Emma invested most of her English learning on preparing for the English test in the College Entrance Exam (known as 'Gaokao'), which mainly emphasised reading, writing and grammar as a closed-book exam on physical sheets. Students did not have a chance to use digital tools in the tests. Because of the strong washback of the College Entrance Exam on the high schools' English curricula and teaching in China, Emma rarely used digital tools, especially AI tools, to learn English before entering the university.

A semi-structured interview design was adopted because it allows researchers to obtain more detailed and relevant in-depth information from the prompts. We adopted several interview questions from Liu et al. (2024), which investigated English language learners' AI adoption and experiences in IDLE. We designed questions to examine English language learners' identities, ideologies and social and economic capital. During the semi-structured interview, Emma illustrated her personal experiences, perceived identities, roles as an English learner and user, values (capital) of the English language and engagement in L2 learning, which are all essential for our analysis (Teng, 2019). For instance, the researcher asked Emma the following guiding questions: 'You are now studying at this university. In the current environment where English is the language of instruction and assessment, what is your current opinion on the value of the English language for your study and career? How do you attach importance to learning English?'

3.3 Data analysis

A qualitative analysis approach was utilised to obtain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the relationship between the EMI context; the learner's ideologies, identities and capital; and investment in IDLE and EMI subjects learning. The data was analysed, and the interrelationships between these

factors and constructs for each participant were discussed in a comprehensive and storytelling manner (Teng, 2019; Zhang & Huang, 2024). Using thematic analysis, the findings were analysed to determine how Emma's previous experiences and the current EMI together shaped her ideologies, identities and capital in relation to her investment in IDLE and EMI subjects learning to outclass. Coding was applied manually in Microsoft Office Word by grouping them with themes such as EMI, IDLE and AI-IDLE ideologies, identity construction, access and affordance of traditional IDLE and AI-IDLE.

Precisely, we first analysed how the EMI context and Emma's capital influenced her ideologies and investment in informal digital learning for L2 and EMI subjects. Then, our focus was on investigating how the EMI context, Emma's ideologies and available and expected capital influenced her identity and investment in IDLE and EMI subjects learning to outclass. Finally, access to and affordances of digital resources for Emma's investment as a type of capital were analysed.

4 Findings

4.1 Ideologies and capital in IDLE and informal EMI subject learning

The EMI context had a significant impact on Emma's ideologies and attitudes towards the English language as a lingua franca (universal tool), especially in terms of oral English skills. Emma planned to improve and invest in her L2 speaking competence for communication in the current EMI context. She also expected to invest in improving her English speaking skills as a lever for her future study, career and living abroad, which are her expected future social and economic capital.

> First of all, in our university's strong English environment, I believe speaking good English is essential for communication, especially with EAP and academic subject (EMI) teachers. If I can't express myself well in English, I may miss out on important knowledge. That's why I feel anxious and want to improve my English for better communication. Also, before university, I rarely used English as a communication tool—I mostly read short texts. The current EMI environment is quite challenging for me.

Emma's positive attitudes towards English language competence played a crucial role in how she approached learning and technology for informal L2 and subject learning. Regarding how important English is to her current and future study, job opportunity and life, Emma answered:

> It's essential for me because I want to do English-related occupations in the future. I also need to master this language for when I study and live abroad in the future. It's crucial for my future study and career.

In terms of the convenience and efficiency of using digital resources, Emma highly valued digital tools that make L2 learning (i.e. IDLE) accessible and time-efficient.

> Mobile phone's vocabulary (translation) apps are very convenient to access…The apps also have a review feature, which saves time compared to writing them down by hand, and this is valuable for me when learning English after class.

Emma preferred L2 learning by accessing digital resources of real-world English content, such as short stories and life lessons of creators, over formal or traditional academic materials. This reflects Emma's view that learning is more effective when it connects to practical, meaningful genres and contexts. This IDLE-positive stance enhances Emma's investment in IDLE, as she found enjoyment in diverse practical online content that resonates with her interests.

I usually follow along with content creators and influencers using English or bilingual language(s) (English and Chinese). I especially like online videos of short stories or interesting life lessons in pure (exclusive) English. These creators of English videos are not necessarily from foreign countries.

With various available digital resources (including AI tools), Emma widely invested in L2 (i.e. both in general English and EAP) and EMI/academic subject (e.g. the Introduction to Journalism Studies course) learning. Specifically, she mostly invested (participated and put effort) in EAP tasks and skills outside the classroom, as EAP was arranged as a core and compulsory course with challenging tasks for Year-1 students.

To illustrate, when asked whether Emma used digital resources—including AI—more for general English learning, EAP or subject learning in EMI courses, she reflected on her usage patterns across different learning contexts. Emma responded:

I use them in a comprehensive way, not just for EAP. However, since our EAP course has the highest English proficiency requirements among all subjects, it's also the one where I use these tools and platforms the most frequently.

In AI-mediated IDLE and EMI learning, Emma expressed highly positive attitudes towards generative AI tools as helpful to her overall IDLE and informal EMI subject learning:

Very much so. Generative AI tools reduce the time spent searching for incorrect information, quickly provide background materials and make it easier to preview English content for my English and subject learning.

Emma also acknowledged the important functions and high efficiency of generative AI tools in IDLE and informal EMI subject learning:

The first function is that they can provide the information I want in a timely manner. The second is their efficiency, fast translation with additional information. I don't have anything else to add.

Emma sees AI and digital tools as enhancements to traditional learning, not replacements. She described AI as 'almost like having my own teacher beside me', valuing its ability to provide personalised support alongside classroom instruction. This perspective supported Emma's investment in L2 and subject learning, as it made learning feel more manageable and tailored, reinforcing the long-term dedication to English mastery.

I'm very grateful. I think it significantly assists me in searching for information and materials and helps with what teachers can't provide immediately outside the classroom. It makes my EAP and EMI subjects learning more convenient and faster, almost like having my own teacher beside me.

When asked about the opportunities AI brings to English learning or education, Emma expressed:

It can help with tasks and assignments, such as presentations. I also learned about AI-driven speaking practice, which alleviates the difficulty of finding ways to practice speaking and breaks down communication barriers.

At the same time, Emma was worried about the use of AI in EMI and IDLE, which hindered her reliance and trust in using AL tools in EMI learning and IDLE:

I'm concerned that using AI for writing might lead to academic integrity issues. So, I don't rely on AI in learning English and academic subjects.

Overall, in a university implementing full-EMI pedagogies, Emma held positive attitudes towards English language learning (especially in English speaking competence), and various accessible digital resources for IDLE and informal EMI subjects learning. The positive ideologies are positively influenced by the EMI context, where English competence is essential for students' academic success and daily communication with teachers. Emma's social, linguistic and economic capital is influenced by the EMI educational system (which demands high tuition fees but provides more English language support than conventional Chinese universities) (Liao et al., 2025), previous English learning experience and available digital English learning platforms. Emma's ideologies are also related to her hopes and plans to increase her social capital (academic success and living abroad convenience) and economic capital (better career opportunities and development).

4.2 Identity construction as a long-term and strategically motivated English language learner

The EMI context and Emma's positive attitudes towards English language competence, digital resources for L2 and EMI learning influenced her identity construction. Emma's identity—how she viewed herself as an English learner—anchored her sustained effort and shaped her learning behaviours.

Emma perceived herself as a long-term English language learner. Having studied English for over 10 years, she perceived herself as having deeply invested in the English language and planned to keep investing in learning and improving this language.

> I have been learning English for many years—over 10 years in total. I have put much effort into learning English. I will keep improving my English because I am English-majored, and I will use this language in my future career.

However, Emma did not perceive herself as competent enough in the English language. Knowing that English language competence is essential in the EMI educational system because English is the medium used to learn and access academic subjects and resources, it boosted her investment in L2 learning for a long time.

> First of all, I think my English learning ability is not enough, especially when compared with some of my peers. My English level does not meet my current needs. So, I will spend more time improving my English competence and making more effort to eliminate the gap between my English skills and my English-competent peers in such an English-medium environment.

It is noteworthy that Emma also viewed herself as a strategically motivated English language investor. As previously discussed, she actively enhanced her L2 proficiency to navigate the EMI environment effectively, manage peer pressure and secure future economic and social capital. Emma's improvement was primarily driven by environmental and social factors rather than intrinsic passion or motivation for the English language.

> I think I'm somewhere in between being proactive and passive. For sure, getting into a higher level of education is my top priority. Next, achieving good grades is the key to that. Later on, finding a job and making a living might be the focus.

Emma's major purpose in levelling up L2 competence was to pursue a postgraduate degree abroad in a top-ranked institution, with an aim to gain fundamental social capital. The next goal was to strengthen her economic capital, which would open doors to more job opportunities with potentially decent salaries.

Emma's identity as a long-term and strategically motivated EFL learner fostered her investment in L2 and EMI subject learning, framing her English learning as a continuous journey rather than a short-term one. The EMI context, where academic success relies heavily on English proficiency and active engagement with English-medium content, heightens the demands placed on learners and reinforces the need for sustained language investment. In response, Emma consistently engaged with a range of digital

resources (including online platforms, mobile applications and AI tools) as part of her self-directed learning strategy, exploring tools and strategies that align with her L2 and EMI subject learning goals. She actively took responsibility for her progress and made efforts to meet the language and academic demands of her university studies, further illustrating how learner identity and institutional context significantly influenced her investment.

Emma's consistent use of digital resources, including online platforms, applications and AI tools, reflects this enduring dedication as she took ownership of her learning, exploring tools and strategies that align with her L2 and EMI subject learning goals.

4.3 Access and affordance of traditional digital resources for investment in IDLE and EMI subjects learning

Diverse and accessible digital resources, such as mobile applications (software), AI tools and online platforms, supported Emma's L2 investment in all general English skills. These skills included speaking, listening, writing and reading, which are essential not only for general language development but also for succeeding in her EMI courses. These digital tools enabled her to better understand academic lectures, complete reading assignments and express her ideas more clearly in speaking assessments and classroom discussions, thus supporting both her language proficiency and academic learning in the EMI environment.

> Digital resources provide me with sufficient resources, which is the most important thing, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing…Maybe speaking and writing might be more emphasised, while listening might be a bit less.

Due to the EMI context, Emma's positive English language ideologies, long-standing identity as an English learner, expectations of social and economic capital associated with English and access to digital English learning resources, she invested significant time in both IDLE and EMI course learning. She mentioned:

> I think I spend around 4 or 5 hours each week studying English and engaging with EMI courses through digital tools after class. I spent most of the time remembering English vocabulary, followed by reading English articles suggested by my EAP teacher.

Since subject and academic English terminologies are fundamental and challenging in EAP and EMI learning, Emma spent most of her IDLE time learning and acquiring terminologies: 'Searching, practising and memorising English words take most of the time'.

Bilingual translation/vocabulary applications offered Emma efficient word searches, storage and review, streamlining vocabulary acquisition. Emma paid for the VIP membership of Collins Dictionary because of its significance for her L2 and EMI subject learning. The English learning applications supported Emma's use and participation in IDLE by providing a structured, low-effort way to practice regularly, embedding learning into their routine. As she mentioned:

> The vocabulary translation applications on mobile phones are very convenient to access. During class, I can directly search for and save words during the teacher's pauses. The applications also have a review feature, which saves time compared to writing them down by hand, which is valuable for me to learn English after class.

4.4 Access and affordance of generative AI tools for investment in AI-IDLE and EMI learning

All the applications, online platforms and AI tools were convenient for Emma to access as well as free (most of them). This reveals that the accessibility and affordance of L2 resources as capital significantly

influenced Emma's AI-IDLE and EMI learning. Specifically, Emma found Doubao and DeepSeek as the most convenient and accessible generative AI tools.

> Those apps, online platforms and AI tools are all convenient for me. For instance, both Doubao and Deepseek are free and can be downloaded directly for use. Moreover, if you want to use them, you just need to describe your problem without any additional charges or fees…ChatGPT is more efficient with a paid plan, but accessing information that's not easy for me is more difficult. Doubao is easy to access and use, but it often lags.

Current AI tools are recognised as rich resources for Emma's AI-IDLE (especially in EAP/academic English) and EMI subject learning.

> I think it might enhance the accuracy of knowledge. For instance, when I translate a single sentence with an ordinary translation, I can only convey its meaning. But now, with AI, I can pinpoint specific words and translate them precisely. What is the best meaning? I think it's more accurate like this compared to ordinary translation.

Accessible AI tools (i.e. Doubao, ChatGPT and Deepseek) helped Emma with different L2 tasks such as translation, text polishing for presentations and generating practice questions. These tools facilitated her participation by offering immediate and tailored support, such as refining speaking exam materials.

> In translation, I think AI tools have a high accuracy in expressing the meanings of sentences. For instance, traditional (non-AI) translation apps and websites can only convey words meaning in a whole sentence. But now, using AI, I can see more precise and accurate translations of each word or phrase in a sentence. I think they are more accurate compared to traditional translation tools.

Emma used Deepseek, an emerging yet highly efficient AI tool, to invest in IDLE (mostly in EAP) and EMI learning:

> For me, the most important function of Deepseek is to summarise and generalise long texts precisely and quickly. I think it was very useful. It has saved me from intensive tasks. Besides reading, I also used Deepseek to design a questionnaire for my EAP course. I also asked it to explain our topics and suggest some potential questions for me to use. After designing my questionnaire, I used it to help me review and refine the questions.

For participation and engagement in AI-IDLE in speaking practice, Emma found physical living and study spaces to be essential resources. However, regarding AI-mediated L2 speaking practices, her participation was significantly restricted by a shared dorm room with other students without a private living room:

> I haven't used it yet. I don't plan to use it because there's no suitable place to speak in my dorm, and it feels a bit unnatural. I might use it if I had a private space.

Emma found AI tools to be very helpful in EAP learning in several aspects:

> Currently, the biggest help is with providing material for speaking exams and assisting with practice, as well as helping with daily writing and background research.

Emma, however, emphasised that the accuracy of AI tools in searching academic resources/materials in EFL and EMI learning could be enhanced further:

> I hope that when working on projects, AI can help find accurate citations because its ability to search academic papers is currently weak, leading to inaccurate citations and difficulty in finding reliable sources.

Emma also frequently utilised generative AI tools (mainly Doubao) to support her informal English language and EMI subject learning.

> I mainly use Doubao for daily queries in English language learning and subject learning. For learning, I use it to translate Chinese into English when I am doing surveys to generate practice questions with about 80% accuracy. It also translates the answers of the participants of my surveys into English and provides me with explanations.

Emma also used AI tools to polish English writing texts, prepare for oral presentations and translate obscure vocabulary between English and Chinese, saving her a significant amount of time in searching for materials and translating complex content and terminology:

> Regarding English speaking, before oral presentations, I have AI polish my written text, and I also ask for translations of obscure vocabulary…The advantages are that it reduces time spent searching for incorrect information, meets current needs and quickly provides background materials I didn't understand in class. The translation function is fast and provides additional information. I haven't thought of any disadvantages yet.

On the other hand, Emma did not overly rely on AI tools because she was cautious of the ethical and academic integrity issues of using AI tools in L2 and EMI subject learning:

> For writing, I don't usually let AI do the writing because I'm afraid of plagiarism, but I do ask for help with sentence structure or checking words. For listening, I use AI when I don't have appropriate material, but overall, I use it less often.

In such an EMI educational context, Emma expected the university to provide students with more digital English learning resources and guides for their EAP, general English and EMI subject learning.

> I think it would be even better if our school could provide more English learning resources and guides, not just for EAP learning but also for learning comprehensive English and academic subjects.

5 Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study show how a first-year undergraduate student, Emma, at a transnational EMI university in China invests in IDLE and EMI academic subject learning outside the formal classroom.

Emma's investment in IDLE and EMI subject learning is profoundly influenced by the EMI environment (institutional emphasis on English competence and EMI subjects), which positions English as a critical tool for academic success and communication. This can be explained by the argument that institutional ideological structure influences individuals' ideologies (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Her ideologies reflect a positive belief in the value of English proficiency, not only for navigating the current EMI context but also for future social and economic opportunities (Iikkanen, 2022), such as studying or working abroad for career opportunities. This aligns with Darvin and Norton's (2015) assertion that learners invest in language learning based on perceived ideological benefits tied to their aspirations. Emma's positive attitudes towards digital resources and AI tools, perceiving them as efficient, accessible and personalised learning aids, further enhances her investment, echoing prior research on IDLE's role in fostering autonomy (Lee, 2019; Soyoof et al., 2023). However, her concern about academic integrity when using AI for writing suggests a critical awareness that tempers her reliance on technology, adding nuance to her ideological positioning.

Regarding the learner's identity, Emma sees herself as a long-term EFL learner with over a decade of experience, yet perceives her English competence, particularly in speaking, as insufficient for the

EMI context. This self-perception drives her sustained investment in digital resources to bridge the gap between her current skills and her goals, which strengthens the argument that identity shapes learners' engagement with language learning (Reynolds et al., 2024; Norton, 2013; Xie & Fang, 2025). She balanced a desire for improvement with pragmatic academic and career priorities, further motivating her to integrate digital tools into her routine, reflecting a negotiated commitment to L2 learning (Cai et al., 2022; Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Emma's capital, including economic (e.g. access to EMI education, access to devices and paid apps such as Collins Dictionary VIP and expected job opportunities), social (e.g. interactions in the EMI setting and academic and professional future development) and cultural (e.g. prior EFL experience), facilitates her investment while also being a goal of it. She leverages these resources to enhance her linguistic capital (English proficiency), which she anticipates will yield greater social and economic capital in the future. This dynamic interplay aligns with Darvin and Norton's (2017) argument that learners invest in L2 to increase the value of their symbolic and material resources.

The findings corroborate previous IDLE research, which highlights the potential of IDLE to enhance language proficiency and learner autonomy (Lee & Drajati, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). Emma's use of vocabulary apps, Bilibili videos and AI tools reflects the interest-driven nature of IDLE. Research proved that personal passion can motivate learners to engage with informal digital learning materials in meaningful ways, fostering immersive and self-directed language development (Sauro, 2019; Kiaer & Lo, 2025). In addition, Emma's positive experiences with AI for tasks including translation and text summarisation support studies on AI-IDLE, which emphasise its capacity for immediate feedback and tailored support (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022). However, challenges such as limited private space for speaking practice and ethical concerns about AI use highlight barriers to full investment, consistent with calls for careful integration of technology in language learning (Liu et al., 2025a).

In general, accessibility and affordance of digital resources and tools are crucial for Emma's investment in IDLE and informal digital EMI subject learning. Emma's awareness of AI emerged with the rapid development of generative AI tools, indicating a relatively recent shift toward AI-mediated/ supported L2 and EMI subject learning.

Figure 2

Investment in IDLE (including AI-IDLE) and EMI Subject Learning
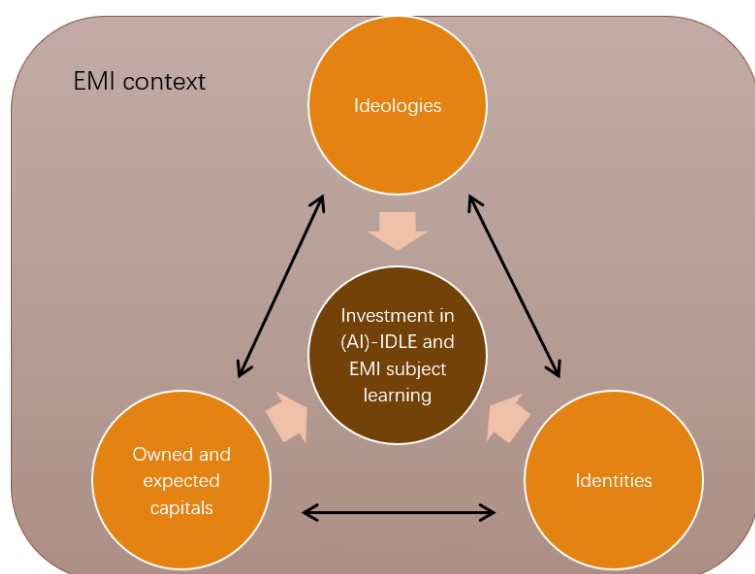
Overall, as displayed in Figure 2, the EMI context has imposed significant effects on individuals' ideologies, identities and capital (social and economic). These three constructs are interrelated with

each other and directly decide the learner's investment in L2 learning and EMI subject learning through traditional digital resources (i.e. vocabulary and translation apps and online video platforms) and generative AI tools.

The study offers actionable insights for educators, learners and institutions in EMI contexts. First, educators, including course coordinators, EMI subject teachers and L2 instructors, should recognise the value of IDLE and integrate it into pedagogy by guiding students toward effective digital tools and strategies. For instance, recommending vocabulary acquisition applications, such as Quizlet, and offering guidance on utilising AI tools, such as ChatGPT, to improve academic writing assignments could significantly enhance learner engagement and investment. Addressing Emma's speaking challenges, educators might consider creating more structured opportunities for oral practice, such as virtual conversation platforms or AI-mediated speaking tasks, to complement students' informal learning experiences (Kiaer & Lo, 2025). The results align with Lee (2021), which emphasise the value of pedagogical interventions that bridge informal digital learning and formal instruction.

Regarding learners in EMI settings, it is suggested that a proactive yet critical approach to digital resources, selecting tools that align with personal goals while being mindful of limitations, can maximise L2 and academic learning. Learners could benefit from experimenting with AI tools for diverse tasks (e.g. speaking practice and text polishing/proofreading) while maintaining academic integrity. As both L2 and EMI subjects are the two main pedagogical objectives in China's tertiary EMI education (Liao et al., 2025), there is no significant difference between Emma's investment in IDLE and EMI subject learning.

As for higher institutions and policymakers, the findings reveal the need for institutional support, such as providing access to digital resources and training on their use. EMI universities could develop guides or workshops on employing IDLE and AI-IDLE to ensure equitable access to technology and foster an environment that supports learner autonomy.

6 Conclusion

Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, the present study examined how a first-year undergraduate in a Chinese EMI university invests in IDLE and academic subjects. This research illuminates how the EMI context shapes the learner's ideologies, identity and capital, driving commitment to L2 and EMI subject learning via digital tools and AI, corresponding to the argument that universities' ideological forces influence individuals' perspectives and actions (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). The findings reveal Emma's positive attitudes towards English and technology in English language learning, her identity as a long-term yet strategically motivated EFL learner, and how her mobilisation of various capital underpins her investment. She uses digital resources to enhance her English proficiency and academic performance, motivated by current needs and future aspirations. Emma's overlapping investment in IDLE and EMI subject learning (e.g. translating languages and searching resources) indicates an inseparable relationship between the learner's L2 learning and academic subject learning in an EMI context. Despite challenges including ethical concerns and spatial constraints, her experience highlights IDLE's transformative potential in bridging formal and informal learning spaces.

This is a single-participant case study, and the findings are context-specific and may not be generalisable to other learners or EMI settings. Reliance on self-reported interview data also introduces potential bias. Future research could employ mixed methods and larger samples to explore IDLE as well as AI tools across diverse EMI contexts, examining how different ideologies, identities and capital influence investment. Investigating institutional interventions to support IDLE could further bridge theory and practice.

This research contributes to applied linguistics and CALL by providing empirical evidence of how individual factors interact within an EMI context to shape students' investment in IDLE (including AI-IDLE) and EMI subjects learning. It underscores the role of digital technologies in empowering

learners to take ownership of their language acquisition, offering practical implications for enhancing learner autonomy in transnational education settings. Ultimately, fostering investment in IDLE requires a holistic approach to further unpack learners' ideological beliefs, identity negotiations and capital resources for more equitable and effective language learning in a digital age. Future studies investigating more undergraduates' and postgraduates' investment in utilising digital resources (including AI tools) for L2 and EMI subject learning, with the relation of their ideologies, identities and capital in various educational contexts, are warranted.

References

Belda-Medina, J., & Calvo-Ferrer, J. R. (2022). Using chatbots as AI conversational partners in language learning. *Applied Sciences*, *12*(17), 8427.

Cai, Y., Fang, F., Sun, H., & Jiang, L. (2022). Unpacking identity construction and negotiation: A case study of Chinese undergraduate students' social and academic experiences while studying abroad. *System*, *110*, 102896

Cutrim Schmid, E. (2022). 'I think it's boring if you now only speak English': Enhancing learner investment in EFL learning through the use of plurilingual tasks. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *16*(1), 67–81.

Darvin, R. (2019). L2 motivation and investment. In M. Lamb, K. Csizér, A. Henry, S. Ryan, (Eds.). *Palgrave Handbook of Motivation for Language Learning* (pp. 245–264) Palgrave MacMillian.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *35*, 36–56.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2017). Language, identity, and investment in the twenty-first century. *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, *3*, 227–240.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2023). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Language Teaching*, *56*(1), 29–40.

Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal, 100*(1), 19-47.

Ebadi, S., & Amini, A. (2024). Examining the roles of social presence and human-likeness on Iranian EFL learners' motivation using artificial intelligence technology: A case of CSIEC chatbot. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *32*(2), 655–673.

Fang, F., Soleimanzadeh, S., Zhang, W., & Elahi Shirvan, M. (2023). Chinese students' multilingual identity constructions after studying abroad: A multi-theoretical perspective. *System*, *115*, 103053.

Guan, L., Zhang, E. Y., & Gu, M. M. (2024, online first). Examining generative AI–mediated informal digital learning of English practices with social cognitive theory: A mixed-methods study. *ReCALL*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344024000259

Hu, G. (2019). English-medium instruction in higher education: Lessons from China. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, *16*(1), 1-11.

Iikkanen, P. (2022). Migrant women, work, and investment in language learning: Two success stories. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *13*(4), 545–571.

Jiang, L., Zhang, L. J., & May, S. (2019). Implementing English-medium instruction (EMI) in China: Teachers' practices and perceptions, and students' learning motivation and needs. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *22* (2), 107-119.

Kiaer, J., & Lo, A. W. (2025). *Fandom language learning: A digital transformation of language education in the AI age*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lee, J. S. (2019). Informal digital learning of English and second language vocabulary outcomes: Can quantity conquer quality? *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *50*(2), 767–778.

Lee, J. S., & Drajati, N. A. (2019). English as an international language beyond the ELT classroom. *ELT Journal*, *73*(4), 419–427.

Lee, J. S. (2021). *Informal digital learning of English: Research to practice*. Routledge.

Liao, S. J., Zhang, L. J., & May, S. (2025, online first). English-medium instruction (EMI) language policy and implementation in China's higher education system: Growth, challenges, opportunities, solutions, and future directions. *Current Issues in Language Planning,* 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2025.2453263

Liu, G., & Darvin, R. (2024). From rural China to the digital wilds: Negotiating digital repertoires to claim the right to speak. *TESOL Quarterly*, *58*(1), 334–362.

Liu, G. L. (2025). Digital empowerment for rural migrant students in China: Identity, investment, and digital literacies beyond the classroom. *ReCALL*, 37(2), 215-231.

Liu, G. L., Darvin, R., & Ma, C. (2024, online first). Exploring AI-mediated informal digital learning of English (AI-IDLE): A mixed-method investigation of Chinese EFL learners' AI adoption and experiences. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2024.2310288

Liu, G., Soyoof, A., Lee, J., & Zhang, L. J. (2025a, online first). Informal digital learning of English (IDLE) in Asian EFL contexts: A thematic review. *RELC Journal*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882251332309

Liu, G. L., Zou, M. M., Soyoof, A., & Chiu, M. M. (2025b). Untangling the relationship between AI-mediated informal digital learning of English (AI-IDLE), foreign language enjoyment and the ideal L2 self: Evidence from Chinese university EFL students. *European Journal of Education, 60*(1), https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12846

Lockett, M., Jiang, Y., & Cai, C. (2021). Study abroad without leaving China. *China Daily*. <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202112/10/WS61b2ee28a310cdd39bc7a9f8.html>. Retrieved 10 April, 2025.

Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching*, *51*(1), 36–76.

McKinley, J., Rose, H., & Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2023). EMI in Chinese higher education: The muddy water of 'Englishisation'. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *14*(6), 1475–1481.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation*. Multilingual Matters.

Reynolds, B. L., Ren, N., Li, J. Z., & Fang, F. (2024, online first). International students' investment in learning Cantonese, English, Mandarin, and Portuguese in multilingual Macao. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2024.2406847

Rose, H., McKinley, J., Xu, X., & Zhou, S. (2020). Investigating policy and implementation of English medium instruction in higher education institutions in China. London: *British Council*.

Sauro, S. (2017). Fandom and Online Interest Groups. In Thorne, S., May, S. (eds) *Language, Education and Technology. Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp. 131-142). Springer.

Sauro, S., Dressman, M., & Sadler, R. W. (2019). Fan Fiction and Informal Language Learning. In *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning* (pp. 139–151). John Wiley & Sons.

Sockett, G., & Toffoli, D. (2012a). Beyond learner autonomy: A dynamic systems view of the informal learning of English in virtual online communities. *ReCALL*, *24*(2), 138–151.

Soltanian, N., & Ghapanchi, Z. (2021). EFL student-teachers' imaginations of English language and their motivation for learning and teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *47*(3), 457–459.

Soyoof, A., Reynolds, B. L., Vazquez-Calvo, B., & McLay, K. (2023). Informal digital learning of English (IDLE): A scoping review of what has been done and a look towards what is to come. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *36*(4), 608–640.

Soyoof, A., Gee, J. P., & Liu, G. L. (2025, online first). From tools to discourses: In conversation with James Paul Gee on literacy and artificial intelligence. *RELC Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882251355879

Tajeddin, Z., Kerfoot, C., & Fereydoonfar, M. (2023). Language learners' linguistic investment in ideologically framed language institutes: Forms of capital, ideology, and identity. *Linguistics and Education, 77*, 101220.

Teng, M. F. (2019). Learner identity and learners' investment in EFL learning: A multiple case study. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *7*(1), 43–60.

Wang, B., Rau, P.-L. P., & Yuan, T. (2023). Measuring user competence in using artificial intelligence: Validity and reliability of artificial intelligence literacy scale. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *42*(9), 1324–1337.

Xie, X., & Fang, F. (2025). 'Walking out from the flat': Pre-service English language teachers' experiences of and needs for English as a lingua franca during study-abroad. *Language and Education*, *3*9(3), 771-789.

Xue, M. (2022). Investment in learning English: A case study of Chinese LOTE learners. *Asian Social Science, 18*(9), 27–34.

Zhang, Y., & Huang, J. (2024). Learner identity and investment in EFL, EMI, and ESL contexts: A longitudinal case study of one pre-service teacher. *Journal of Language*, *Identity & Education*, 1–14.

Sam Junwei Liao is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Auckland, New Zealand. His research interests include English-medium instruction (EMI), translanguaging pedagogy, language policy and English language teaching (ELT). He obtained his bachelor's degree in science from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University and master's degree from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He worked as a Part-time Student Assistant and Full-time Research Assistant at the Department of English at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2710-7890

Fan Fang is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, College of Liberal Arts, Shantou University, China. His research interests include Global Englishes, language attitude, identity, intercultural communication and language education. He has published widely in both local and international journals. His recent books include a monograph titled *Re-positioning accent attitude in the Global Englishes paradigm* (Routledge) and edited volumes titled *Critical Perspectives on Global Englishes in Asia: Language Policy, Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment* (2019, co-edited with Dr Handoyo Widodo), *Policies, Politics, and Ideologies of English Medium Instruction in Asian Universities: Unsettling Critical Edges* (2023, co-edited with Dr Pramod K. Sah) and *English-Medium Instruction Pedagogies in Multilingual Universities in Asia* (2024, co-edited with Dr Pramod K. Sah).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4210-9042

Xiao Cao, MA in TESOL, is Associate Language Lecturer in Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. His research interests are innovative pedagogical approaches to enhance students' English language learning experiences, and the integration of gamification into English language teaching.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3117-552X

Wenjun Wang is a Ph.D. candidate at Cleveland State University in Ohio. Her research primarily focuses on sociolinguistics and the sociology of education, where she explores the interplay between language, society, and educational systems. Through her interdisciplinary work, she aims to offer new insights into the dynamics of social change and communication within educational settings.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5091-3830