

# Using Digital Learning Platforms To Enhance Medical Students' Motivation in EMP Courses

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of digital learning platforms on medical students' motivation in their English for Medical Purposes courses, using Self-Determination Theory as the theoretical framework. The research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with three research tools, including a structured questionnaire, classroom observations of three classes and two focus group interviews with 12 volunteering. Results have shown that digital learning platforms significantly boosted the students' motivation in learning medical English. The present study also reported how digital learning platforms were utilized in the English for Medical Purposes classes, the interaction patterns of the students when they learned with the tools and psychological factors that motivated the students in the learning. These findings highlighted the need for incorporating digital learning platforms into the English for Medical Purposes curriculum to enhance medical students' motivation in learning medical English and increase the learning outcomes as well.

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Digital learning platforms; motivation; Self-Determination Theory; English for Medical Purposes.

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## 1 Introduction

As a subset of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP) plays a crucial role in contemporary medical education. Medical students are required to achieve sufficient medical English proficiency as English is the primary language in scientific publications, international conferences and worldwide healthcare communication [1].

However, students still encounter substantial difficulties in learning medical English. The main challenge emerges from Greek and Latin roots that create complex medical vocabulary [2]. This poses another significant difficulty when most students

experience language anxiety and low confidence in learning the specialized language [3]. Moreover, pedagogical limitations and inadequate learning resources also present obstacles to successful learning of the specialized language among students [3]. Besides these challenges, Vietnamese medical students, in particular, also perceive that their low level of general English competency causes considerable difficulty in comprehending medical texts written in English [4].

Research have shown that motivation serves as the main factor which determines how well students learn languages [5]. Students who lack motivation show lower levels of active participation and regular practice

which leads to their failure in retaining vocabulary for long. For this reason, there is a practical need to develop effective teaching methods that will increase students' learning outcomes while maintaining their interest in learning medical English.

At Nguyen Tat Thanh University, the Medical English department has been introduced since 2021, aiming to equip medical students with sufficient knowledge of medical English to meet the required standards of English level mandated by the university. The university has consistently encouraged both teachers and students to use digital learning platforms including Learning Management Systems (LMS), online interactive tools, multimedia resources and mobile applications for their teaching and learning activities in order to achieve desired learning outcomes and boost greater engagement among students.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Digital learning platforms

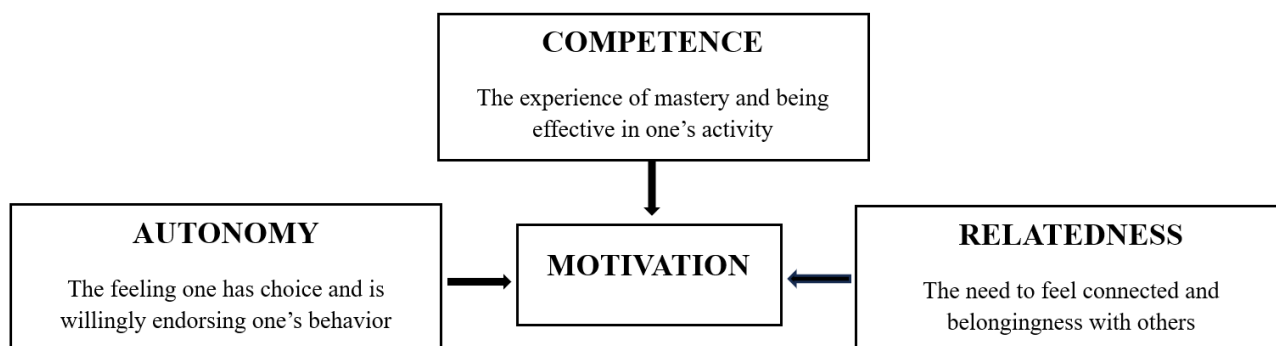
Digital learning platforms are defined as systems that integrate technology with the Internet to deliver educational content and create interactive learning spaces outside the classrooms [6]. On the other hand, digital platforms are also defined as software tools to manage educational content and track students' progress in a blended classroom environment [7]. Furthermore, digital platforms utilize digital technologies that enable communication among students and teachers as well as assist teachers in evaluating students' progress through online assessments and quizzes [8]. The combined definitions

show that digital learning platforms function as interactive educational systems which allow students to participate in assessment activities while interacting with teachers and peers in both online and blended learning environments.

Digital learning platforms have various types which provide support for different instructional purposes. Adaptive learning platforms represent a major category which uses algorithms together with learning analytics to create personalized instruction for students based on their performance and progress. The systems can adjust the content difficulty and provide specific feedback while predicting learning results [8]. In other words, adaptive learning platforms can create personalized learning pathways which enable students to progress based on their competencies, meeting the needs of diverse learners. Moreover, digital platforms which combine assessment features with gamification elements also gain increasing popularity. The tools provide online quizzes and classroom response systems together with game elements which include points and badges and leaderboards to support formative assessment and students' engagement [8].

### 2.2 Underlying theories of motivation in language learning

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan provides a complete motivation framework that differentiates between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The cognitive performance and engagement patterns of students are clearly shown through the core components of Self-Determination Theory [9].



**Figure 1** Self-Determination Theory framework [9].

Accordingly, SDT consists of three fundamental dimensions, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness. From the theory, people experience autonomy when they can actively take control over their own learning and have the freedom to choose their actions. In terms of competence, learners demonstrate their ability to perform academic tasks successfully. Meanwhile, relatedness enables them to build bonds with other people during the implementation of activities [9]. It has been found that when these requirements are met, students develop self-directed learning and remain motivated in their studies [9].

In the digital era, digital learning platforms offer multiple features which have proven to students develop the three fundamental aspects of SDT [10]. Digital learning platforms provide opportunities for students to develop autonomy through their self-paced modules and flexible learning paths and optional tasks so that students can decide on their learning preferences. The systems also use immediate feedback and adaptive quizzes and progress-tracking dashboards to help learners build their competencies through performance assessment which they need to maintain their motivation to learn. Online learning spaces enable students to develop social connections through interactive activities which include discussion forums and peer collaboration practices.

### 2.3 Previous studies

Earlier studies demonstrated that digital learning platforms boost students' motivation because they create interactive learning environments which allow students to learn independently. It was found that digital educational platforms and applications used in higher education helped students develop learning motivation and academic knowledge when they enabled students to participate actively and manage their own learning process [11]. Another research study showed that interactive online course technologies help students learn better because they deliver instant assessments and offer multimedia content and opportunities for group work which keep students interested in learning [12]. In the field of ESP, using digital technology tools creates positive effects on

students' learning attitudes and their motivation to learn. According to them, digital technology implementation in ESP classrooms created better learning outcomes through interactive educational content which improved students' access to learning resources [13]. The systematic review also revealed that mobile learning platforms for English for Specific Purposes academic programs helped students learn better through their ability to study language in different real-life situations which results in higher motivation levels [14]. Strikingly, medical students experienced motivational links to their perceived professional relevance because technology-based learning environments provide authentic materials which prepare students for their future medical careers [15]. The research shows that digital learning platforms increase students' motivation through two main factors, which include technological interactivity and the creation of learning experiences that match students' educational goals and expectations.

In the Vietnamese context, a study conducted at a private university discovered that simulation-based digital learning enhanced medical students' satisfaction and confidence in healthcare education [16]. In addition, the students at Da Nang University of Medical Technology and Pharmacy, who participated in the survey of 631 students, found that online learning platforms provided two main benefits which included time savings and convenience, leading to their increased motivation. Nevertheless, the students admitted facing three main problems which included unstable internet access, their limited digital abilities and their tendency to get distracted while using the internet [17]. Moreover, a study conducted at School of Medicine - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City revealed that three factors which included perceived usefulness, convenience and accessibility of the platforms determined students' satisfaction and motivation in learning [18].

From these previous studies, it is clear that existing research on digital learning platforms for medical education does not address essential gaps. First, most studies focus on medical education in general rather

than English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Second, existing studies often emphasize general perceptions of e-learning without clearly identifying specific instructional methods or pedagogical practices, which creates challenges for assessing how these platforms boost students' motivation. Moreover, most studies use self-reported data from surveys and interviews for their findings with a lack of classroom observations as a tool to get a general picture of students' actual learning behavior and interaction in real settings. The current study, therefore, was conducted to fill in these gaps.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research site and sampling

The research took place at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Regarding sampling, the required sample size has to be calculated using a formula ( $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ ) based on the total population and a specific error tolerance level [19]. As there were around 600 students in the entire cohort of second-year students in the department, a sample size of about 240 students at a 5% margin of error is required. In the current study, there were 272 students taking part in the survey and this number surpassed the estimated minimum sample size. Therefore, the quantitative results from this sample size are considered reliable.

Among 272 participants, there were 117 males and 155 counterparts aged between 19 years old to 21 years old, all of whom had finished their General English courses in the previous semesters and just started their first specialized course of English Medical Terminology.

#### 3.2 Research design and instruments

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. An explanatory sequential design is defined as an approach with two phases: quantitative data is collected first before qualitative data is gathered to give more detailed explanations of the quantitative findings [20]. This process aims to provide statistical evidence of an effect or a phenomenon, which is followed by the analysis of qualitative data to further interpret the findings [20]. This approach is suitable for

the current study as it aligns with the aims of the study. The initial quantitative phase would help the researcher to quantitatively assess the extent to which digital learning platforms affect students' motivation. Then qualitative data is collected to clarify the students' experiences and perceptions towards these tools, which is used to elaborate their effects on the students' motivation in EMP courses.

There were three different research tools used to gather data for the study. The first instrument was a structured Likert-scale questionnaire aiming to preliminarily collect quantitative data about the students' perceptions of the use of digital platforms and the effects of these tools on their motivation and engagement. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part gathered the participants' background information including class, age and duration of English learning. The second part contained 12 question items, which evaluated the students' motivation based on three aspects of the Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The questions were translated into Vietnamese so as to avoid students' misunderstanding and delivered online via Google form to the whole cohort's Zalo group after the course ended, which allowed them to reflect on their learning experience.

**Table 1** Cronbach's alpha Reliability for STD subscale

No.	STD subscale	Cronbach's alpha	Interpretation
1	Autonomy	0.77	Acceptable reliability
2	Competence	0.89	Good reliability
3	Relatedness	0.81	Good reliability

Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values between 0.7 and 0.8 meet acceptance standards [21]. The table shows that all three subscales which measure autonomy, competence and relatedness present internal consistency results which range from 0.77 to 0.89, meaning that the questionnaire was reliable to be used in the study.

Next, three EMP classes were directly observed to investigate how digital learning platforms were used and how the students interacted with these platforms during their lessons. Then the researchers conducted

two focus group interviews with 12 volunteer students to collect detailed qualitative data about their experiences and challenges with the digital learning platforms to complement the data collected from the questionnaire.

For data analysis, quantitative data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS version 22 to examine descriptive statistics including frequencies, means and standard deviations to assess students' motivation in relation to the platforms. Then the researchers conducted an analysis of classroom observations by examining detailed field notes which revealed how digital learning platforms were utilized in classroom activities and how students participated. Next, focus group interview responses, on the other hand, were transcribed and conducted based on themes to identify the students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of the digital learning tools in their learning process.

The qualitative findings helped the researcher to better understand the students' reasons, justifications and experiences that led to survey results, which allows for the combination of both types of data for complete comprehension of the real practice of using digital platforms in EMP classrooms and their effects on the students' motivation in learning medical English.

The researcher decided to employ only descriptive analysis because the study is merely exploratory and does not involve formal hypothesis testing nor draw conclusions about a broader population[22]. Instead, the researcher used descriptive statistics including means, max, min and standard deviations to summarize and present a clear description of the students' responses.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 The use of digital learning platforms in EMP classes

Six classroom observations were conducted in three Medical English classes which the three teacher participants were in charge of. The findings revealed numerous digital learning platforms were widely used throughout the pre-class, in-class period and the post-class stages.

#### 4.1.1 Pre-class activities

During the course, the three teachers employed multiple digital platforms to communicate with their students through Zalo, Gmail, the institutional Learning Management System and Google Classroom. The platforms were chosen for different functions but shared a common purpose. In all three classes, the teachers uploaded the lecture slides and medical terminology lists as well as reading materials to the institutional LMS system one or two days before the class meetings. The students were required to preview the vocabulary and relevant materials for the upcoming lessons before classes. At this stage, there were no pre-class assignments or activities.

#### 4.1.2 In-class activities

The teachers used digital platforms during their teaching to create lessons that actively engaged the students. First, the teachers used PowerPoint slides as their main teaching resource to demonstrate medical concepts together with key medical terms. Then interactive platforms like Kahoot! and Quizizz, Blooket, Gimki, Padlet, etc. Were employed by the teachers to create active learning environments through vocabulary comprehension check and review activities and games. These activities and games came in a variety of forms, either requiring the students to work on their own or compete with others. This created an interactive learning environment so that the students had the opportunities to consolidate their knowledge and have fun at the same time.

#### 4.1.3 Post-class activities

Digital platforms were also used in the post-class stage to enable the students to continue their learning through assigned tasks and review activities as homework. The teachers used the LMS and Google Classroom to share supplementary materials and create assignments which the students were required to do through online quizzes from Quizizz and Blooket. The quizzes assessed the students' knowledge of medical terms and essential learning concepts which they had learned in the previous lessons. The students could receive instant feedback and scores after they finished the quizzes, which helped them to reinforce their understanding of the knowledge through

the errors and wrong answers. In some cases, the students were also required to record role-play conversations of doctor-patient dialogues or oral presentations and submit their work through the digital platforms. The activities provided the students with opportunities to develop their

communication skills and apply the medical vocabulary in practical situations.

#### 4.2 Students' perceptions towards the use of digital platforms in their EMP classes

##### 4.2.1 Students' autonomy development

**Table 2** Perceived impact of digital learning platforms on Autonomy

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
<i>Self-Determination – Autonomy</i>					
A1. The digital learning platforms align well with my choices and interests.	272	3	5	4.21	0.781
A2. The digital learning platforms fit perfectly the way I prefer to study medical English.	272	3	5	3.97	0.684
A3. I feel that my use of digital learning platforms is an expression of my own learning choices.	272	2	5	3.64	0.857
A4. I feel that I have sufficient freedom to choose how and when to use digital learning platforms for my studies.	272	2	5	3.72	0.901

The Table 2 shows that the students held positive perceptions about the digital platforms used in their courses. The scores range from 2 to 5, with a mean between 3.64 and 4.21 on a five-point Likert scale. The standard deviation values were generally low, ranging from 0.781 to 0.901. This shows that the students' responses were consistent with minimal disparity among the items.

Complementing the findings, the data from the focus groups also reveal that the students developed greater independence in their learning through the use of digital platforms. The students reported that platforms such as Google Classroom and the LMS allowed them to manage their own learning pace and prioritize content based on their individual needs. One participant stated that *“On Google Classroom, I can review the vocabulary before class and focus more on the words I find difficult”* (FG1-S2). Another

participant further stated: *“If I miss something in class, I can check the slides again on the LMS instead of asking the teacher immediately”* (FG1-S4). Interactive gaming platforms like Blooket and Kahoot! and Quizizz were also perceived to enable the students to learn independently through an instant feedback system which allowed the students to evaluate their own progress. One student commented: *“When we play Blooket, I realize which medical terms I still don't remember, so I review them again later because the link for the game review is available on Google classroom”* (FG2-S4). Another student mentioned, *“Quizizz shows my mistakes right away, so I know what I need to improve without waiting for the teacher”* (FG2-S3). This means the students demonstrated their autonomy in their learning through their responses.

##### 4.2.2 Students' competence development

**Table 3** Perceived impact of digital learning platforms on Competence

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
<i>Self-Determination – Competence</i>					
C1. I feel that I am making significant progress toward my learning goals through digital learning platforms.	272	3	5	4.07	0.885
C2. I feel that I use digital learning platforms effectively to achieve my academic goals.	272	2	5	3.88	0.974

C3. I feel confident in my ability to use digital learning platforms successfully.	272	2	5	3.96	0.883
C4. I feel capable of managing digital learning platforms to enhance my learning outcomes.	272	3	5	4.22	0.614

The students showed positive views towards the use of digital learning platforms, with the mean score of all items reaching above 3.0 and a minimum score of 2. Strikingly, most of them agreed that they could confidently navigate the platforms to achieve their desired learning outcomes. The standard deviation values showed a range from 0.614 to 0.974 which indicated that the students answered with both low levels of variability in their responses.

The responses from the focus groups supported these findings. The students reported that they found Google Classroom and the institutional LMS platform simple to use and convenient (FG1-S1, FG1-S2, FG1-S4, FG2-S1, FG2-S3, FG2-S5). The students also agreed that they achieved their learning objectives through the digital platforms which helped them learn medical terminology successfully. As they shared, “When the

teacher uploads vocabulary lists and quizzes online, I can review many times, so I feel my medical English improves gradually” (FG2-S3, FG2-S4). Some other participants noted, “*Doing quizzes on Quizizz or Blooket helps me realize how much I understand. I keep working until I remember all the terms in the lesson*” (FG1-S1, FG1-S2). Interestingly, some students appreciated the use of digital platforms in enhancing their confidence in learning medical English (FG1-S2, FG1-S3, FG1-S5, FG2-S1, FG2-S4, FG2-S5). From their sharing, the digital tools helped them reduce their embarrassment in learning because no one would notice when they made mistakes. This helped to improve their confidence by providing them with the opportunities to learn at their own pace.

4.2.3 Students’ relatedness development

**Table 4** Perceived impact of digital learning platforms on Relatedness

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
<i>Self-Determination – Relatedness</i>					
R1. I feel comfortable interacting with others through digital learning platforms.	272	3	5	4.12	0.659
R2. I feel connected to my classmates when using digital learning platforms.	272	1	5	3.67	1.126
R3. I feel that digital learning platforms provide open and supportive communication channels with my peers.	272	2	5	3.83	0.971
R4. I feel at ease collaborating with others through digital learning platforms.	272	3	5	4.03	0.744

It is shown that the students generally agreed that the digital learning platforms had a positive impact on their relatedness with others. This category received scores varying between 1 and 5, and mean scores ranging from 3.67 to 4.12. The standard deviation values appeared consistent throughout most items which demonstrated that the participants shared similar opinions. However, the item R2 showed a higher standard deviation (SD = 1.126) compared to the other items. The higher dispersion demonstrates that the students responded with greater

variation because they viewed digital platforms as providing different levels of peer connection.

According to the data from the focus groups, some participants highlighted that the interactive tools such as Padlet created meaningful opportunities for peer interaction. One student demonstrated this through his sharing: “On Padlet, I can post my ideas and read my classmates’ answers. I also comment on their posts” (FG2-S5). Another participant further explained: “*When someone writes a good answer on Padlet or*



*Mentimeter, I can hit the heart icon, so it feels more interactive and encouraging” (FG2-S3). Moreover, some others admitted the increased interactivity through the game-based activities on platforms like Bloocket, Quizlet or Kahoot!. In their opinion, there were times when the teachers allowed them to play the games in groups, either to support or compete with one another. This, in turn, created opportunities for them to interact with others while enjoying the fun together.*

However, some participants reported limited experiences with peer connection on certain platforms. One participant noted, *“On the LMS, I mostly download materials. The platform lacks any real social interaction” (FG1-S4). Another participant stated: “We rarely communicate with others when doing the activities assigned on the platforms. It is because the teachers mostly let us play individual games or do self-review activities” (FG2-S4).*

## 5 Discussion

The research findings show both conformity with existing literature and provide new information about the way digital tools operate in medical English instruction.

On the one hand, the findings demonstrate that digital learning platforms increase students’ motivation by enabling them to learn at their own pace while delivering personalized learning support based on their individual needs [8, 16-18]. The students reported that platforms such as LMS systems, Quizizz, and Padlet allowed them to review materials in advance, revisit vocabulary lists, and complete quizzes multiple times. This insight aligns with the claim about the accessibility of learning resources offered by digital learning platforms, resulting in students’ achievement of better learning outcomes [13]. The study also supports previous findings which demonstrate that instant feedback improves students’ level of engagement. The automated quizzes together with online exercises delivered immediate feedback to students which helped them discover their errors and develop their skills without needing to wait for teacher’s support [8, 12].

However, there are several new findings revealed, contributing to the existing literature. First, with the implementation of classroom observations, the study shows structured integration of digital platforms into the EMP courses throughout pre-class, in-class and post-class activities with specific tasks and assignments for students in each stage of the class. Moreover, the findings of the study demonstrate that the digital platforms used in the courses significantly reshape the practice of social interaction among the students instead of increasing it. In other words, these platforms are perceived to be more suitable for self-paced learning and review while there are other forms of interaction, such as comment and “liking” features offered by Padlet in which the students reported feeling encouraged when their classmates reacted positively to their work. Another interesting finding from the study is the psychological safety resulting from the use of digital platforms in doing quizzes to review medical terms. This, according to the students, helps them to avoid embarrassment and fear of negative evaluations when they make mistakes. Finally, the study brings a fresh perspective through its examination of medical English which represents a specialized field that demands more advanced cognitive abilities than General English. This next context promisingly paves way for future research on innovative approaches to enhance learners’ outcomes in the ESP field.

## 6 Conclusion

This research investigated the impact of digital learning platforms on medical students’ motivation to study EMP courses. The research used three methods for gathering data which included classroom observations, questionnaires and focus group interviews, revealing that digital platforms enabled the students to develop three important aspects of SDT which, in turn, enhanced their motivation in learning medical English. The research demonstrates that self-paced learning, along with immediate feedback and accessible study materials help to enhance students’ ability to learn independently while developing their competence and maintaining their interest in the learning process. The

research also introduces several novel findings which further contributes to the existing literature on the field. Further studies could be conducted to examine whether the motivational effects of digital learning platforms are sustained throughout extended periods. Moreover, the relationship between motivation and actual learning outcomes, such as improvements in medical vocabulary, pronunciation, or professional

communication skills can also be worth a thorough investigation. In addition, future research should expand the research scope by including different ESP disciplines or institutions to enhance generalizability. The study may compare medical English with other ESP fields to determine whether decreased embarrassment and anxiety have special importance in medical environments.

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## Sử dụng nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số để nâng cao động lực học tập của sinh viên y khoa trong các học phần tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y

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**Tóm tắt** Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm mục đích điều tra ảnh hưởng của các nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số đến động lực học tập của sinh viên y khoa trong các khóa học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y khoa, sử dụng Lý thuyết Tự quyết làm khung lý thuyết. Nghiên cứu sử dụng thiết kế phương pháp hỗn hợp tuần tự giải thích với ba công cụ nghiên cứu, bao gồm bảng câu hỏi có cấu trúc, quan sát lớp học của ba lớp và hai cuộc phỏng vấn nhóm tập trung với 12 sinh viên tình nguyện tham gia. Nghiên cứu cho thấy các nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số đã thúc đẩy đáng kể động lực học tập tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y khoa của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra những phát hiện mới về cách thức sử dụng các nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số trong các lớp học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y, các mô hình tương tác của sinh viên khi học tập với các công cụ này và các yếu tố tâm lý thúc đẩy sinh viên trong học tập. Những phát hiện này nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết phải tích hợp các nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số vào chương trình giảng dạy tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y để nâng cao động lực học tập tiếng Anh chuyên ngành y của sinh viên y khoa và đồng thời cải thiện kết quả học tập.

**Từ khóa** Nền tảng học tập kỹ thuật số; động lực; thuyết tự quyết; tiếng Anh chuyên ngành Y.

