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The significance of digital communication in ESL (English as a second language) Improvement

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Abstract

The main objective of the research is to assess the significance of digital communication in ESL improvement. The objectives included determining how frequently digital communication is used to learn ESL and investigating the forms of digital communication students use to learn ESL and how they use them. Objectives also included investigating the forms of digital communication students use to learn ESL and how they use them and determine the challenges faced in using digital communication platforms for ESL learning. The study will use a descriptive analytical research design. The technique is an exploratory sequential design where both qualitative data will be collected and analytical methods used to determine how two variables relate drawing conclusions from the responses from

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participants. The results show that digital communication has an effect on English language improvement if the equipments are available and the technician problems are solved. Accordingly , it os recommended that ESL programs should be designed to encourage students to learn English by using media platforms and social interaction. Learners should be taught how they can use digital communication platforms to improve their language skills.

Keywords: Digital communication , ESL , Learning and teaching , improve

1.0 Introduction

Digital communication is the process of sharing information on an electronic device or getting information from the device. Digital communication media includes computers, television, mobile phones, email, and the internet. Technology has made it easy to share information, ideas, and experiences (Bulman & Fairlie, 2016). Consequently, the teaching-learning process has become more diverse compared to the traditional classroom setting. According to Ng (2016), digital communication has presented enhanced learning opportunities and new opportunities for personal development, communication, and self-expression.

Digital communication has helped mitigate the constraints of time and place through distance learning. People are embracing e-learning to balance busy schedules and knowledge acquisition since learners do not have to be in a traditional classroom setting to acquire information or interact with a teacher and other learners. They can enroll themselves in courses of their choice. Online learning reaches more people and reaches new target groups (Bulman & Fairlie, 2016). Learning is more interactive with digital communication. Learners can hold peer tutoring classes online. Discussions can be held on different platforms without converging, and new information can be obtained from the internet. Digital

communication has changed the perspective of learning only for academic excellence. Due to the flexibility involved, learning can be to attain life skills or know-how to accomplish a task. Electronic books and educative videos are shared online.

Possessing technology skills is important for learners in the 21st-century. The use of technology in schools prepares learners for the outside world (Collins & Halverson, 2018). Educational systems are nowadays rated depending on the amount and level of technology integrated into the system. Digital communication has been observed to improve performance and increase learners' motivation to complete tasks. Technology has reduced the time taken in teaching, and students can retain the information more due to the more advanced visual technology that is used. According to Collins and Halverson (2018), technology makes difficult work accessible to someone with less knowledge in a certain field. In computer-aided learning, the instructor can tailor the content to suit the learners learning pace.

Digital communication is a practical way of teaching and learning a language. To improve reading, speaking, and learning skills in a non-native language, one has to surround themselves with the language. Language teachers have, over the years, devised strategies to teach and enhance learning in learners. The strategies make it possible to teach, share content, and come up with ways of keeping the learner interested and improving performance. Alaga (2016) and Khusniah (2019) identify student-active environments as tools of success for effective foreign language learning. Communication is a vital tool in making learning a foreign language effective. Using digital media to learn and teach ESL presents real-life situations to learners helps them improve and develop communication competence. Instructors are widely using projectors to display teaching material. The use of projectors in the ESL teaching environment helps

teachers deliver material in a systematic and organized way, which saves on time. Films are also effective in teaching ESL and watching television enables students to develop both listening and communication skills. Mainly, it is a highly effective way of acquiring pronunciation skills that cannot be developed from reading books. Tools like social media help students develop language literacy skills (Ng, 2016). Learners build on their ability to understand a language by communicating with others online hereby expressing themselves and enhancing their writing skills.

Digital communication platforms now provide the option to choose the language of preference. Mainly, it is beneficial in learning a language that is not locally spoken. Giving reviews online or commenting on social media posts improves writing skills. An ESL learner can learn new vocabulary and how to use them in a real-life situation. Social media is a digital communication network used by most learners to keep in touch. Facebook and Twitter have numerous communication tasks and information sharing. Users can also choose their preferred language on the platform. Learners can keep in touch with each other practicing the English communication skills learned in the classroom.

The learners can learn at their pace, and their strengths and weaknesses are individually used to personalize their course (Bulman and Fairlie, 2016). There are online learning materials and English learning related courses. Learners have unlimited access to different forms of English literature, and some of the literature is in the form of both books and audio or films. International companies mostly use English as the main language of communication. Billboards and advertisements written in English provoke the mind of an ESL learner to understand the message or check the meaning online. It has been observed to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Digital communication raises the motivation and determination of the learner to learn English (Khusniah, 2019). Digital entertainment platforms make

learning more fun and requiring no major adjustments from learners' unwinding schedule. This chapter gives an overview of digital communication, problem statement, justification, purpose & aims of the research and states the research questions and objectives.

2.0 Problem Statement

Teaching school- based English language only covers major aspects of the language. It is not possible to teach the whole language due to time constraints. To become proficient in the language, one needs to put the basic skills acquired into practice (Khusniah 2019). Globalization has interconnected the world, making it essential to have a universal medium of communication. English has become a global language due to the economic and political power of its native speakers (Abduramov, 2017). More non-native speakers are learning it as a second language. The main aim of learning English to be able to communicate effectively, coherently share ideas and understand what other people are saying (Collins & Halverson, 2018). Many times, people are required to use English in work or leisure situations in a multicultural environment to communicate and interact (Her, 2007). Learning English has become a requirement to be able to adapt to the highly dynamic and interconnected world. People are more inclined to the digital world and spend more time online before (Collins & Halverson, 2018). Unfortunately, there is little research on digital communication platforms that will enhance the improvement of ESL skills for learners and make teaching more effectively.

Young people are introduced to the digital space at a young age and consider the use of the platforms and interactions as leisure and entertainment. Digital communication has become a way of unwinding. Consequently, the incorporation of technology and education has been on the rise (Collins & Halverson, 2018). Many people consider learning a second language to be easier for young children

than adults leading to the need for a learning environment that is fun and interesting to motivate people of all ages to learn the language. Most people prefer using technology to acquire second language skills (Nomass, 2013). Digital skills and English proficiency are almost inseparable. According to World Statistics 2020, English is the most used language in digital communication. Most of the approaches used to teach ESL are traditional and less effective. There is a need to bridge the gap between theoretical classroom knowledge and practical communication aspect of ESL by incorporating digital communication to help build on the skills.

3.0 Justification of the Research

The research attempts to identify the role played by digital communication in improving English proficiency among non-native speakers. The role of technology has been widely studied in the past with the focus mainly on its impact on international relations, trade, commerce, general education and economic aspect. However, significance of digital communication has rarely been studied especially with a focus on ESL improvement. English skills are on high demand to enable global interactions (Her, 2007). Working people want to learn ESL as well as full-time students. Bringing together the needs of the two groups with technology to make it possible for them to learn is crucial. The skills are required to be used in digital communication and one-on-one interactions and adding a practical environment to learning is crucial. People have the notion that learning a second language is demanding and time-consuming (Khusniah, 2019). It is vital to include tasks and activities on digital communication platforms to have real-life experience and use of the language. Consequently, this research paper will address the importance of using digital communication to improve ESL skills and maintain flexibility in the learning environment.

4.0 Purpose and Aims of the Research

The research paper aims at exploring forms of digital communication that influence ESL improvement. The research will identify existing digital communication platforms and how they contribute to improving learners' ESL reading, writing, and pronunciation skills. It will give insight into the use of digital communication to build on the skills taught by a language instructor by analyzing learners' perceptions.

5.0 Research Questions

- 1- What is the significance of digital communication in language improvement?
- 2- Does using digital communication facilitate learning ESL?

6.0 Research Objectives

The main objective of the research is to assess the significance of digital communication in ESL improvement.

The specific objectives to achieve this are:-

- 1- To determine how frequently digital communication is used to learn ESL
- 2- To investigate the forms of digital communication students use to learn ESL and how they use them.
- 3- To evaluate whether the use of digital communication has positive impact on the ability to learn ESL
- 4- To determine the challenges faced in using digital communication platforms for ESL learning.

7.0 Literature Review

7.1 Formal ESL Learning

Formal ESL learning follows structural method and relies on conventional rules in teaching grammar. However, this has faced criticism citing that it does not prepare the learner for the speaking environment and the communication skills acquired from formal teaching are not well developed. Bouzid (2016) defines effective communication as the ability to pass information accurately and coherently with minimal or no mistakes while Raj et al. (2019) adds to this definition by stating the communication is entirely about expressing oneself in an understandable manner to convey information. According to Bouzid (2016), students show proficiency by the level of manual skills and ability to share information and solve problems under different contexts which translates to communication. Sari & Margana (2019) agrees with the findings and illustrates that mastering of speaking skills is the most important skill since it enables one to listen, respond and communicate effectively while perfecting grammar and sentence structure along the way. Kagan (2019) found language learners should be exposed to a practical environment to enable them apply the acquired skills. He states that formal learning combined with a communication approach yields better results in mastery of a language. The literature discusses ESL learning practices which are pertinent to our research. The study is supported by findings from Mitchell (2019) which identify and highlight that there is a gap between classroom teaching of languages and real life practice of the language. Consequently, new strategies need to be implemented to end the mismatch since listening and engaging in speaking activities helps the learner recognize proper grammar.

Sari & Margana (2019) conducted a study on effective strategies of learning a language and found that students are more interested in learning a language when they use videos to learn as opposed to the normal textbooks and other formal

techniques which is similar to findings by Abbas et al. (2019) which demonstrate that visual platforms are known to be more effective in language learning and vocabulary acquisition. The study is relevant since it looks into the significance of informal second language learning environments. It further states that wide use of the internet by learners enables technology to be introduced successfully in the classroom for language learning. The study identifies that teachers are not only supposed to assist language learning but should foster creativity arising from the use of the language. Sockett (2014) and Lai et al. (2015) support this by evaluating the significance of combining the formal and informal learning environment which involves technology. Lai et al. (2015) conducted a study on out-of-class learning experience for students and he found that for most learners', teachers guidance influences the activities and platforms they use to practice. Consequently, technology, motivation and interesting activities in learning a second language have a positive relationship with performance.

7.2 Challenges Facing ESL Teachers and Learners

According to Holmberg (2019) learning a second language is harder than learning a first native language due to factors like the unnatural environment which may be a classroom setting or where the language is not widely spoken. Al-samadi (2013) had previously conducted a study which had similar findings citing that students learning English where the language was not used a lot needed to practice more and try surrounding themselves with the language. Holmberg (2019) and Khan et al.(2017) both agree this challenge exists and add that students prone to forgetting what they have learnt after excessively engaging in their native language

Moses & Mohamad (2019) mentions that one of the common challenges faced by ESL teachers is trying to keep student motivated and having students with different language skills levels in one class. With learners of different levels,

teachers find it hard to plan lessons since they require different approaches in teaching the students. Fattah (2015) agrees with the statement and notes that students can be motivated by incorporating activities that are performed on digital platforms to their curriculum. Similarly, Dubey & Piroška (2019) state that when students use digital platforms for practicing a language, they tend to acquire more knowledge and spend more time learning new words to use. However, the study highlights that the learners' motivation on online learning environments may be affected by lack of technical efficiency in terms of resources like digital devices. Barrot (2020) supports these findings by concluding that schools should facilitate acquisition of laptops for students to use in learning online. He adds that under the guidance of the teacher students can also select activities from online learning environment that suit the level of their skills. According to Al-samadi (2013), another challenge is the large learner capacities in ESL classes. Teachers are unable to engage with each student effectively. Learning a language requires close attention from the instructor. Online platforms can be used in this case to ease the congestion and ensure the needs of each learner are catered for. Sockett (2014) advises that in such an environment, technology and online activities can surround the learner with the English language enabling them practice more. Al-sofi (2016) agrees with the observation says that learners often lack self-confidence to express themselves in the language and motivation to study both in and out of the classroom. He also says that anxiety gets in the way of learners being able to express themselves well. Ultimately, diversifying the learning environment to include activities the learner enjoys and exposing them to a peer-interactive environment helps with the anxiety and boosts their confidence to practice and engage in speech and written communication.

7.3 Technology and ESL Learning

Technology has led to the development of learning media that supports the learning and teaching practice by conveying instructional messages to facilitate student learning (Mellati et al. 2018). Technology provides platforms for theory, information and practical experience. Viberg & Gronlund (2017) conducted a study on students' use of technology and concluded that learning practices should be matched with practice by using technology. The researcher states that curriculum developers should consider that learners use their phones and laptops frequently to perform self-initiated learning activities, and design tools for those learning practices. Consequently, Language curriculum should accommodate individual learning by incorporating technology in regards to students' regular use. The findings are supported by Mellati et al. (2018) whose study asserts that learners are able to improve vocabulary and better other language skills by using social networks as practicing environments. The study on students' use of technology in learning a language illustrated that students prefer learning individually and set their pace since they do not want to spend too much time learning. From the findings, learners avoid reducing time spent on their mobile phones to study. The internet is a learning and interaction environment with audience for creative works. Electronic devices create innovative and diversified learning environments, (Viberg & Gronlund, 2017; Mellati et al., 2018)

Online learning digital platforms help learners create learning communities where they can construct knowledge and share it with others (Ahmed, 2016; Dweikat, 2016 ;Mellati et al., 2018). According to Sari & Magana (2019) , proficiency in a language is not only in understanding what others are saying but also being able to respond effectively. The study further states that media provides a good platform for learning this skill. Sockett (2014) supports the findings of the study and adds that practicing ESL skills outside the classroom has positive

influence on the learner's language skills making them more confident. He also asserts that since the internet social media environment is not formal, an ESL learner may be unaware that online activities improve their language proficiency. Lai et al. (2015) adds to the study findings by observing that learners' who practice outside class and interact with other learners' had high levels of success in the language since the environment is more diverse. Digital communication improves knowledge of English use, improves vocabulary and enhances positive attitude and motivation towards learning a language (Al-sofi, 2016 ; Lai et al., 2015). Online platforms provide a comfortable platform increase willingness of learners' to speak in English. Consequently, elimination of teacher dominance enables learners to express themselves better and improve their communication skills.

7.4 Digital communication Platforms and their Impact on ESL Learning

7.4.1 Facebook

The most popular digital communication platform for written media in the English language is social networking sites (Socket, 2014). Facebook and Twitter create space to share ideas and create discussions (Ahmed, 2016). Dweika (2016) conducted a study to investigate the effect of Facebook on English Communication Skills. In the study he looked at two groups of students where one group joined a Facebook group for ESL learners while the other group did not. The students were then given an English posttest and from the results the students in the Facebook group performed better. From the findings, he recommends that teachers should integrate Facebook in the learning activities where students connect with other learners to enhance information sharing. Ahmed (2016) conducted a similar study to identify effect on writing and grammar skills and had similar finding. From the study, students who were part of Facebook English discussion groups scored higher in the grammar and writing posttest.

7.4.2 You- tube

You-tube is a video platform where learners' can watch English content enabling them perfect their pronunciation, expression, grammar and vocabulary on different topics (Sari & Margana, 2019).Raj et al.(2019) verifies this by stating that students who have used You-tube to learn English are more eloquent and have a higher vocabulary understanding since allows ESL learners to explore their creativity by discussing topics that interest them or on current issues by recording views and uploading them. Sari & Margana(2019) agrees with this and observed that n a classroom setting, students who watch you-tube videos under the guidance of teachers and discuss the contents hence build on vocabulary related to the content and expressing views on the content helps the learner think critically, enhance their collaborative skills and grasps rules of effective communication. Mainly, learners watch content that interests them and are therefore more motivated to create time to spend on You-tube.

You-tube also has music with some of it displaying the lyrics and Sockett (2014) asserts that learners have been observed to improve their pronunciation and writing skills through listening and watching the lyrics to their favorite music. He also mentions that understanding the music lyrics improves comprehension of other written pieces and videos with subtitles contribute hugely to the ability of the learner to understand spoken content .A study was conducted by Holmberg (2019) to determine the effect of You-tube in learning English showed that students who were exposed to You-tube had better vocabulary knowledge and were more eloquent supporting Sockett's (2014). Their writing skills and speech ware also enhanced compared to the ones who did not uses it.

7.4.3 Television/Radio

7.4.4 Video-conferencing

Sockett (2014) highlights that video conferencing is one of effective activities that help build confidence in speech and create a desire to learn more. According to his study, video conferencing skills enhance global competence and the learner is suited to compete in an interconnected world. Lee (2007) had previously conducted a study on the effectiveness of video conferencing in gaining good oral skills and increasing collaborative learning. Finding from his study indicated that students with an initial difficulty in expressing themselves had improved after participating in regular video conferences. Dweika (2016) stated that learners need to interact online with native speakers of a language to get a view of the culture of the language which supports the global competency arising from video conferencing. Consequently, it reduces learner's anxiety and they are eager to learn more quickly to be able to communicate more effectively on the platform. The presence of other people also builds on interaction skills and better listening skills.

8.0 Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the Socio interactive & cultural theory and cognitive theory of learning.

8.1 Socio interactive & cultural Theory

The socio cultural theory explains that an individual's psychology is related to the cultural and institutional environment (Scot & Palinksar, 2013). According to (Ahmed, 2017) culture is the beliefs and practices that are inherited socially and determine the quality of our lives. It focuses on the role of social interactions and cultural activities on psychological development. The theory affirms that development does not only depend on internal factors but external social interactions influence a learner's potential capability. People's behavior and way of

learning is influenced by their surroundings. Language follows and expresses the reality of culture. ESL learners in Saudi Arabia face the challenge of mother tongue influence in learning English. They are surrounded by Arabic speakers and find it hard to practice English outside the classroom. There is also a resistance to learn other languages for fear that it may dilute their strong culture or affect the strong Islamic beliefs which are solely founded in Arabic. According to the interactive approach of the theory, when learners work together, they share and develop knowledge and new strategies.

ESL Learners improve their skills by being under mentorship and interacting with native speakers of the language. Digital communication platforms expose the learner to a socio cultural environment. The environment may either contribute to the improvement of language depending on whether the language used on the platform is the one the learner wants to be proficient in. The learner understands meanings of words in depth by learning how to communicate (Ahmed, 2017). Student- student interactions are also important in learning a language. According to the theory instruction is important since it guides the learners' interaction. (Scot & Palinksar, 2013).

8.2 Cognitive Theory of learning

The Cognitive theory of learning describes how students absorb and retain information after processing to enable individuals to learn effectively (Resnick, 2017). The theory states that understanding is crucial in the learning process which also influences creativity. For students to engage in meaningful practice, meaningful learning must occur first. The cognitive theory utilizes listening, speech, ability to read and write as the main skills in language courses. ESL learners should focus on getting as many language resources as possible to keep them motivate and practice. According to the theory, learning a language is a person's

cognitive effort and outcome depends on their input and interaction. Javed (2017), states that the quality of learning increases when repetition is involved and that teaching without explanation and practice is not effective in developing language skills among learners. He affirms that repetition improves memory retention and learner's who repeat tasks or view content more than once are more likely to be more proficient in a language and they absorb more information.

9.0 Research Methodology

9.1 Research Design

The study will use a descriptive analytical research design. The technique is an exploratory sequential design where both qualitative data will be collected and analytical methods used to determine how two variables relate drawing conclusions from the responses from participants (Creswell, 2014). According to Nassaji (2015) teaching and learning a second language is complex due to the fact that every teacher and learner may have a different environment, perception and experience. To conduct a significant and satisfactory research in the ESL field, a researcher has to understand and examine the general learning environment and influential factors in the environment (Nassaji, 2015). Moreover, the researcher should also determine the experience, attitude and behavior of individual learners. The technique is also suitable to the study since it involves a teaching-learning environment which is hard to control or stage-manage for observation (Rensick, 2018). Descriptive techniques alone do not identify the significance of a factor hence we use incorporate analytical methods to determine the significance of digital communication in ESL development.

For the descriptive research design, qualitative methods will be used since we have no understanding of the ESL learners in the study and this will explain

more about them (Creswell, 2014). Analytical techniques will use the qualitative data to show the relationship being analyzed by the study. A combination of both the descriptive and analytical study will provide a better insight on the digital communication platforms commonly used and what effect they have on ESL skills among learners (Rensick, 2018) . The descriptive design will be used to determine characteristics of ESL learners and the digital communication platforms they use in learning English while the analytical design will check the effect of digital communication platforms on ESL performance.

9.2 Study Location

The study will be conducted in Saudi Arabia. The location is chosen because of high prevalence of the native language which requires the ESL learning environment to be distinct from other learning contexts. Mother tongue is also a barrier since Arabic and English are in two very diverse language groups has to spend a lot of time practicing to become proficient in English (Omar et al. 2012). The government has resulted to motivating people to learn the language so that they can acquire global competence. English proficiency is steadily rising in the region.

9.3 Target Population

A non-probability sampling method using a convenience sampling as the preferred too will be used. Study participants will be chosen using the convenience tool depending on their availability to participate and avoid any inconvenience (Etikan et al., 2016).. The tool is used since the study will be conducted virtually by use of video calls due to travel restriction related to Covid-19. The method is not time-consuming and it is cost-effective (Creswell, 2014). A total of 40 ESL learners will be chosen to participate. They will be selected from members of the ESL learning community in Saudi Arabia The study will target adult English language learners who have Arabic as their native language and have spoken and

interacted in the dialect for long influencing how fast they learn English and how much practice they need to be proficient and defy that barrier. The study will involve adult participants because they mainly have unlimited access to digital communication platforms and can explain the ESL competences improved without need of test evaluations.

9.4 Research Instruments

Due to the travel restrictions issued following the Covid-19 pandemic, the study will use interviews as the instrument of data collection and they will be conducted using video calls. Each participant will be interviewed at a different time. The video calls audio will be recorded to ensure no information is lost and the participant's identity is not disclosed (das Nair et al., 2019). Notes will also be taken as the video call interview is conducted.

9.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data will use the content analysis method which will involve listening to the audio recording again, comparing with the notes, understanding and organizing it (Harding, 2018) .The data will then be transcribed. Research objectives will be compared with the data collected. Review of literature and a theoretical framework will help identify patterns to answer the research question.

9.6 Ethical Consideration

Standard research ethics for social sciences will be used in the study (Resnick, 2018). Principles used are consent, anonymity, right to withdraw, avoiding harmful and deceptive practices (Israel, 2014). Respondents will be sent a consent form via email to sign before participating in the study. They will be informed about the purpose of the research and how data collected from them will be used. The participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any

stage of the interview with no explanation. Distinctive identifier codes will be used for each participant to uphold anonymity. The participants will not be exposed to any harmful practices or questions that victimize them. They will be given the option not to answer any question due to their personal reasons.

9.7 Limitations

Due to the travel restrictions participants cannot be grouped into two and issued with test to check their performance. There is also the issue of uncertainty with internet reliability (O’connor & Madge 2017). The data was based on the participants’ individual views which will be used to discuss and make conclusions to investigate the significance of digital communication.

10.0 Results

10.1 Participant Information

All the participants were ESL learners and Arabic was their native language.

10.2 Digital Communication Device.

QN 1:Digital Devices Owned

| Device | Percentage of participants |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Mobile Phone Only | 30% |
| Laptop Only | None |
| Both | 70% |

All the participants said they use the digital communication devices most of the time especially during their free time.

QN2 :Digital Communication Platforms to Learn ESL

| Digital Communication Platform | Percentage of participants who used the platform |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook | 100% |
| You-tube | 95% |
| Twitter | 75% |
| Whatsapp | 98% |
| Video Conferencing | 70% |
| Story bird | 7.5% |
| Peer grade | 1% |
| Google Translate | 25% |

The participants mentioned social interactions with peers, instructors, classmates, other ESL learners, English native speakers which revolved around writing, speaking, listening and reading

Qn3: *Benefits from the Platforms.*

All the participants experienced improvement in their pronunciation, writing skills, reading skills, communication skills, collaborative skills or self confidence depending on the platform they were using.

10.3 Challenges

80% of the participants said they had encountered challenges in using digital communication platforms. 60% mentioned that access to affordable internet was a challenge. 18% said perceptions from other people who doubted that they were using social media to learn was a challenge.

10.4 Overall Perception of digital communication in ESL improvement.

All 40 participants agreed that they had gained significant knowledge from digital communication platforms which they could not gain from the classroom. 35 of them recommended combination of both formal learning and use of online communication in learning.

11.0 Discussion

11.1 Use of Digital Communication Devices

All the participants in the study owned phones and some had computers. The rest who did not own a computer have easy access to one. The relevance of this question was to determine the participants' access to digital communication platforms (Dubey & Piroaska 2019). The participants spent most of their free time either using their phone or laptop. The response alligns with the reviewed literature by Omar et.al (2012) and Bouzid (2016) which observes the digital native generation spends a lot of psychological energy viewing and engaging on social media. which observes that The participants also appeared to be very conversant with digital communication platforms with all of them having diversified preferences of the channels. The most common platforms from the study ware social media networks which included Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp. From the findings all the participants had used at least a form of digital communication platform.

11.2 Use of Digital Communication Platforms to learn English

Facebook was the most used digital communication platform. Most of the students could not go a day without logging onto their Facebook account. To some of them they considered it a pass time. The participants cited easy accessibility from their mobile phones and low internet bundle consumption as the reason for this. Studies conducted by Sockett (2014) and Ahmed (2016) had shown that

students may get more motivated to perfect a language when they use Facebook due to the appealing interactive features and how easy it is to use it Facebook had a large number of users and the participants found it easy to get in touch with people globally due to the interactive features and be informed on current affairs. Due to the popularity among young people there was no pressure to act in a formal way to avoid being judged. Some participants liked using Facebook since they could select the language of choice to use on the platform and interact with celebrities worldwide that they could not interact with on a one-on-basis due to constraints of time and location. Some of the participants were involved in writing pieces in English, shared them on Facebook and they were peer-reviewed by their classmates. Literature by Dweika (2016) had indicated that students engage more meaningfully on social media platforms when they have audience. Consequently it improved their writing skills by increasing their practice time to publish meaningful pieces that they will be confident sharing with the online audience. The finding is consistent to the study by Barrot (2020) which observed that ESL learners became more confident by sharing writing pieces online.

Participants added that they did not have to memorize words on online because regular practical use of the word enhances memory retention. Use of digital communication platforms made participants active and highly engaged in other general activities. Studies by Ibrahim (2013) and Abbas et al. (2019) showed students who interact online and use digital communication platforms have been seen to get more benefits from learning and Facebook eased interactions between a majority of the participants with their lecturers. Instructors are able to comment instantly on online engagements and also enabled the participants keep in touch with other learners after class. Barrot (2020) illustrated that the use of Facebook increased interactions between instructors and learners make the learning

environment more accommodating for both of them which one of the benefits derived by participants in this study. Some of the participant said they use the platform to coordinate group discussions and classmates sought help from each other in understanding assignments. They formed an online learning community which made them more motivated and interested to learn and perform better, improved their critical thinking skills and social development.

You-tube interaction was also common among the participants. One of the reasons for its popularity was that they could use mobile phones to access it at their own convenience. The participants who did not use it often cited the high consumption of internet as the main reason. Participant used You-tube as an entertainment and learning platform which is consistent to Sari & Margana's (2019) understanding of the platform where the learning can either be purposed or incidental. For the participants who used it, they preferred activating the subtitle button to hear both the pronunciation and see the spelling of words. In Al-samadi (2013) literature, he had found subtitles to be beneficial. Additionally the You-tube videos also improved their knowledge on various topics and choice of vocabulary and words to be used in different context among the participants. According to Raj et al. (2019), learners' are more receptive and understand better when they listen and see which can be observed from the participants. The participants had gained more vocabulary from online interactions than in any other way. They had more cultural materials on the English language. There was also a lot of learning content uploaded by instructors and experiences shared by ESL learners and those who had become fluent in the language. A high number of participants appreciated that they could interact with English native speakers online who shared more about the culture of the language. Raj et al.(2019) had emphasized that knowledge of a culture boosts understand and learning of the language . The participants who used

You-tube also said that the since it's a visual platform, they were able to retain information more easily. According literature by Abbas et.al (2019), visual platforms are known to be more effective in the introduction of new words and vocabulary retention.

The participants had the luxury of using the pause button as they watched the videos to capture every detail, replaying them as many times as required and saving them for future reference. Mostly after watching You-tube videos, they would discuss them with other learners who watched the same content enhancing their communication and receptive skills in the process. Audio-visual learning environments were seen to improve a learner's speaking skills at a higher rate compared to reading textbooks by Mitchel (2019) and Kagan (2019). Visualization captures the learner's interest and influences them to have a desire to learn more information. Participants who used the platform were also able to express themselves, reply and contribute to utterances in online social groups due to watching diverse videos and learning to decode the mood. Sari & Margana (2019) had mentioned that You-tube is incorporated in the learning system to teach social expression and engage learners by exposing them to different utterances and make the learning environment more interactive. Most of the participants mentioned that they had made it mandatory to watch all their You- tube content with English subtitles to surround themselves with the language. Mainly it helped solve the challenge being in country where English is not commonly used in normal day-to-day conversations. The activity has significantly improved their eloquence and they were more confident in engaging in English conversations. Eloquence improves since they listen to the native speakers or people who have become experts in the language as illustrated by Sockett (2014). In classroom situations where teachers used You-tube videos to teach vocabulary, participants expressed that they enjoyed

the lesson more and had grasped the content well. Four of the participants had learnt English using You-tube instruction videos from scratch. They had acquired both grammar and communication skills which they practiced by recording their views and getting feedback from native speakers they had connected with online. Studies by Sockett (2014) had shown that that when the learning process is initiated by a student from a point of interest, there is a higher probability of acquiring the desired skills.

Twitter is a microblogging tool that a high number of participants used in online interactions. It is used by a diverse group of people to express opinions on arising issues and engage in discussions. Most of the participants used the social networking site. Those who did not said it they did not know how to use it due to its complexity. Lai et al.(2015) had learners should be given the freedom to use social media activities and explore them in the course of learning so as to develop awareness about the practices on the networks.

Participants who used the network said that the twitter activities developed their writing skills. Interactions with their instructors were also enhanced. According to Holmberg's (2019) studies social media interactions enable a learner to understand how English words are used in different contexts by native speakers. The participants also developed digital literacy skills and engaged in inter-cultural interactions. They also interacted with their instructors and peers and learnt from their posts. Mitchel (2019) had observed that digital communication platforms bridge the knowledge gap between theoretical knowledge and actual practice. He adds that twitter transforms the dynamics of a classroom by providing a practical approach enhancing critical thinking.

From the study, WhatsApp was also seen to foster listening and oral skills. All the participants used the application to send direct messages more than any

other phone application. From review of the study by Fattah (2015) observation was made that students do not like engaging in writing activities in the formal classroom setting since they find it boring. WhatsApp presents an interesting platform to develop learning skills. Participants enjoyed listening to audios from their peers in English and also recorded their responses to practice the language. Some of the participants said that their instructors also used the platform for oral activities. They shared learning documents and instructional videos with classmates and some instructors sent pre-reading activities through WhatsApp. Some had formed learning groups with other learners and native speakers they had met online and checked engaged in discussion in English. According to the social interaction and cultural theory, ESL learners learn English faster by interacting with other learners and teachers via social groups. WhatsApp network can be used in teaching large classes to ensure the interactive is effective unlike physical classes for large group in language subject. Through WhatsApp, participants said they were able to consult instructors with no time restrictions.

Video conferencing was used by 50% of the participants. The applications mentioned for the video calls were Zoom, Skype and Google Hangouts. The participants had a chance to use video conferencing vocabulary that they had learnt in theory. Some participants said it enhanced their confidence while communicating and they learnt new vocabulary. Lee (2007) and Dweika (2016) had highlighted that video conferencing reduce anxiety and self-doubt in the learner when communicating. They were also able to interact with their peers and instructors. According to some of the participants, video conferencing is convenient due to the flexibility of space.

Less than 10% of the participants used Storybird which is a digital storytelling platform. Viberg & Gronlund (2017) had observed that technology

moves away from the teacher-led way of learning to student-active sessions. Some of the participants who used the platform said they were not comfortable using their communication skills in public citing accent issues hence opted to writing blogs where they expresses their views and feelings in writing.

Other digital communication platforms that were not so common were Peergrade and Google translate. The participants who used them had noticed significant improvement in their writing and communication skills. Peergrade helped them review writing pieces by their peers and theirs were also reviewed. Their critical skills also improved. Google translate was used to translate words from Arabic to English and it enhance their vocabulary acquisition and understanding. All the participants showed enthusiasm to the idea adding the use of digital communication platforms in ESL formal learning.

11.3 Challenges faced using digital communication platforms

Some of the participants cited lack of internet or poor internet connectivity as a factor that derailed their use of digital communication to practice. They also faced criticism that social media distracts learning.

12.0 Recommendations

1- ESL programs should be designed to encourage students to learn English by using media platforms and social interaction. ESL learning teachers should embrace new technologies and explore incorporating social media usage in communicating with students. They should devise ways to use technology based activities.

2- Learners should be taught how they can use digital communication platforms to improve their language skills. They should strive to direct learning focus to building competent communication skills to facilitate international interactions.

3- The study is restricted to the role of digital communication in ESL improvement according to the learner .However further studies should be conducted to find out the significance of digital communication in teaching practices and outcomes.

4- One-on-one interactions with native speakers should also be analyzed and studies on how learners from poor communities can access digital communication platforms should also be evaluated. Integration of digital communication platforms into learner systems should also be studied.

5- Students should be encouraged to engage in more mobile applications for English learning. Teachers can use some of the platforms for out-of class discussions to issue assignment.

6- Learning institutions and network service providers can have collaborations where students are provided with internet bundles at subsidized rates. Students should be provided with wireless connection in the school to access online learning platforms.

13.0 Conclusion

The study contributes to research by making a conclusion that there is a positive effect of digital communication in ESL improvement. Overall each of the participants had seen improvement in at least one language skill which was facilitated by the use of a digital platform. From the results, it is evident that learner's have embrace the use of digital communication platforms to practice language skills. They have also demonstrated immense improvement in English proficiency. Based on the research, digital communication platforms can complement other learning methods by engaging students and raising their levels of motivation. Facebook has helped enhance their writing, vocabulary, communication and interaction skills. You-tube has developed their listening,

pronunciation, vocabulary and communication skills. Participating in video calls helps the learner perfect the speech aspect of the language.

The study also observes that ESL learners have positive attitudes, experience and perception of digital communication. Social media promotes learners' aware of their writing and communication skills. Digital communication is considered to be an informal learning environment and from the study its effectiveness is language improvement can surpass most formal and conventional methods. Digital literacy skills are crucial for competence in the 21st century. The skills are different from those taught in the traditional learning environment. Repeated exposure to the English language sentence structure and use of word on the digital platform reinforces knowledge and discovery of ESL communities online.

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