To Improve English Language Skills, Student's Perception towards Technology

Win Yu Yu Maung[1], Thiri Soe Win[2]

[1]Lecturer, [2]Assistant Lecturer

[1,2]English Department, University of Computer Studies, Mandalay, Myanmar

ABSTRACT

The use of technology has become an important part of the teaching and learning process in and out of the class. With the fast pace of the development of technology, using technology in learning English has great potential to support student-centered learning and imperative to meet the educational needs of the younger generation. The objectives of this research are to investigate students' perception in using technological tools such as social media, websites, English learning application etc. in English language learning and to explore whether these tools could be useful to improve their English skills. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the students of University of Computer Studies, Mandalay. Research findings revealed that the technological materials they use are useful for getting general knowledge, information and to increase their language competency.

KEYWORDS: learning materials, student-centered learning, student perception, social media, teaching and learning process

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of technology, people from different cultures come into contact with one another more easily and more frequently than ever before. The need for mastering a foreign language for international communication is growing at a fast pace. Easy accesses to digital devices and internet as well as the increasing number of English learning websites have helped many people learn this global language online.

However, the use of technology in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching has included films, radio, language laboratories, videos, and computer since the 1980s (Cunningham, 1998).With the advanced technology, it can be said that web- based technologies and powerful Internet connection provide various new possibilities for the development of educational technology (Jones, 2002; Cabada et. al, 2009; Yazdanpanah, Sahragard and Rahimi (2010). Therefore, the Net Generation' learning styles (Prensky, 2001) is differing from the previous generations. Digital devices such as computer or mobile can provide learners with many fun games and communicative activities that reduce learners' stress and anxiety. Meanwhile, technology based language learning can help learners improve their linguistic skills, affect their attitudes towards language learning and build self-confidence. According to Bull and Ma (2001), technology offers unlimited resources to learners.

Moreover, with rapid information and many authentic materials, web- based learning environments have great potential to support student-centered learning as they are flexible, interactive and rich in resources. Moving forward to the Internet age and online forums are a widely use channels for learner to communicate and learn from one another by using the written words. Lam and Lawrence (2002), technology assists learners in adjusting their own learning process and they can have access to a lot of information, with a variety of applications either offline or online, that their teachers are not able to provide, from anywhere and at any time. Technology-based language learning English can promote learners' efficiency with English-Spelling checker, digital Oxford dictionary, web-based IELTS, pronounce or phonetic and contraction practice. In development of technology, as the youths today use technology like the internet more than previous generations, the purpose of the study is to investigate learners' perception in using technological types of improving English skills. By knowing the perception and perceptive of the learners towards technology, teachers can try to improve the teaching materials in order to increase the quality of teaching.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet technology is transforming the way we communicate, socialize, play, shop and learn new things. The latest electric gadgets with multi- purposes uses like voice calls, messaging, chatting, web-browsing, multimedia, and translation are easy to operate and available at affordable prices. Furthermore, integrating internet technology with language learning software programs, portability, speed, audio output and visual features give people amazing opportunities to get up-to-date information as well as unlimited resources and to be independent learners rather than receiving knowledge merely from teachers in a traditional manner. Thus, online tools play a great role in raising awareness about English language learning.

Google is the most popular technological tool for learners. Everyone can get any information they need. It is the world's

most popular search engine. Billions of people generate 3.5 billion searches every day and it also offers a huge variety of peripheral services. In 2019, google.com is the number one most popular website in both the global market and in the US.

Wikis is a collaborative website that can help students to develop their writing skill (Erban et al., 2009;. Erban etal., 2009:173 suggest the following websites that may help teachers and students:

➢ www.useingenglish.com
➢ www.sitesforteachers.com
➢ www.eslgalaxy.com
➢ www.atozteacherstuff.com
➢ www.coollessons.org
➢ www.eslcafe.com

With the fast pace of the development of technology, the usage of YouTube videos in teaching and learning has become a trend. YouTube with its official address www.youtube.com is a well-known video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips (Duffy, 2008 in Roodt & Peier, 2013). Based on the statistical report on its official website, it has more than one billion visitors every month and thousands of videos on thousands of topics in many languages are available on YouTube. Kreisen (2009) viewed that YouTube has helped all students to learn more about other cultures since the videos are uploaded by people all around the world. It is also allowed students to do video sharing which can give positive output for learning (Snelson, 2009). Stempleski et. Al, (2001) agreed that YouTube videos can attract the students' interest to pay attention better due to the audio and visual aids provided.

According to Blattner and Fiori (2009), Facebook is the fastest growing and best known site on the internet that has more than 100 million members. They also believe that Facebook can be a powerful learning tool since it allows its users to experience various patterns of interaction. In 2006, Stuzman exposed from his survey that university going students are the largest users of Facebook. Veer (2010) considers facebook as a hip hot and happening site where members can witness each other's life by viewing and sharing numerous quantities of information. Facebook people can imitate different types of real life conversations as they can poke a friend, give a virtual hi or hello, write on somebody's wall and send cyber gifts. Thus, Facebook offers several forums for students where they can find job, roommate or even textbook (Blattner and Fiori, 2009). Another social media like Facebook is twitter, an online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets. There are also popular social media websites such as WeChat, Instagram, LINE, QQ, Weibo, Whats app, Viber, Pinterest, Snapchat and VK.

In addition, with the accelerated development of Apps about learning English and the popularization of mobile devices among learners, learners have become increasingly interested in the learning benefits that apps on mobile devices bring. According to relevant research, the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can not only enhance learners' English ability but also increase learners' learning motivation. Seemingly, it is helpful and efficient for learners using mobile devices to learn English by themselves (Liu & Xuan He, 2014). There are a lot of apps referring to learning

English for learners who have an easy access to these resources and materials. But the reality is that the app market is like a jungle. There are too many software for learners to choose and use. Obviously, there is a lack of recommendation about relevant apps and suggestions about how effectively to use them to learn English (Liu & Xuan He, 2014). So, it is important to choose appropriate apps for language learning.

3. METHODS
The research has been conducted at English Department, University of Computer Studies (Mandalay). Based on data collected from 100 students, this research measures the useful contribution of using technology in foreign language learning skills. We used questionnaires and interviews for collecting quantitation and qualitative data from student respondents. In this survey, we use 10 closed questions to explore the students' perceptions about the use of social media, websites and English language applications to improve their English language skills. In addition to closed questions, there are also open questions to give the students the opportunities to declare the opinion about their learning styles. Data and the answers are classified according to the topic.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This study revealed that most of the students have been using technological tools since they know how to use the communication gadget. It shows types and percentage of technological they use. But the most common and popular one is using Google as shown in Fig1. This website is used 100% students. The second popular ones are YouTube and Facebook. These are used by 48% and 44% of students while other technological tools, English learning application, Instagram are used only around 21% and 5% respectively by the students.

The students 92% said that social media such as Facebook and YouTube enable them to share the information to others. This became possible as the students have ample opportunities in exploring the media through internet and share the information to other friends and groups as well as provide almost everything they need in the learning process. Only 8% of the students are not happy.
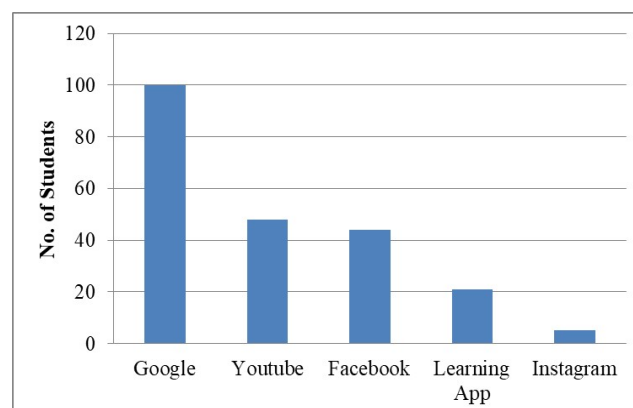

Fig1. Types and percentage of technological tools used by the students

According to the students, these technological tools are not only useful in helping them to improve their skill in English but also there are many purposes in using these tools. As shown in Fig2, the dominant reason is to improve English

skills, 36%. The rest of the student's answer that these tools can offer general information and general knowledge, each account for 24%, 34% and these tools can provide fun for the users, 19%.
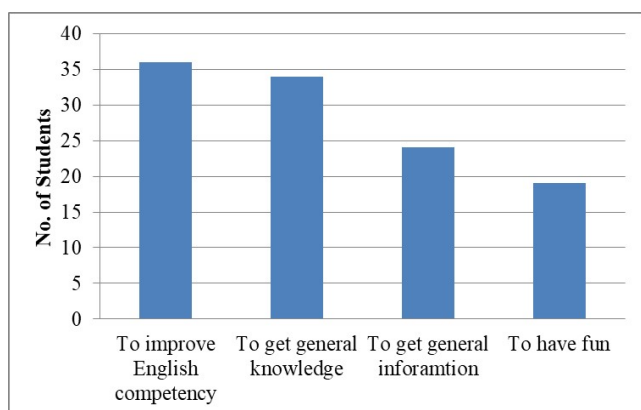

Fig2. The purpose of using technological tools

With the advance of communication technology, the use of technology from time to time is expected to be increasingly easier and user friendly. Information technology equipment has been influencing students. It uses English as a default language. Many students also use English as their means of communication because this language has been preinstalled in the gadget at the first place.

The use of technological tools has brought a big impact on the people's life, either positive or negative ones. Among other positive impact of social media are: easy and more efficient in distributing news, easy to make contact with people across the world and long distance communication with single touch with social networking. More importantly are the availability of abundance of information on the internet with finger tips access from everywhere in the world. Internet has become must equipment, smart book or a big encyclopedia. They can update knowledge and access the relevant information for them.

In addition to the advantage of social media, there are also some disadvantages of social media. For example, the social interaction and social cohesion may become weak because of lack of direct interactions and emotional exchange among people. People may also get misunderstanding as the emotion and feeling are not easily represented by symbol and letter. What the people really feel is not easily understood by the other side. Sometimes, other people get the opposite meaning of what other people really mean. Other problems are cyber bullying, cheating or even stealing information and money, security threat and addiction to the internet which sometimes can be dangerous. These negative impacts of the social media have taken victims such as persecution done by some people as results of war in the social media.

5. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION IN USING TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS

The first objective of this research is to find out the perception of students in using the technological tools such as websites, social media, and English learning applications to improve their English skills. Based on the survey we found that 28% of the students strongly agree that using these tools can increase their English skills and 63% of the students agree that the use of these tools have positive impact on the learning process. The rest of the students do not agree to use these tools but the number of this category is only 9% of the students.

The second objective of this research is to explore whether these tools could be useful to enhance their English skills. Table1 shows that about 92% of the students stated that these tools are very useful, simple, practical, easy to use and understand and can be used everywhere and anytime. 1% feels unhappy with these tools. In other words, using these tools has significant advantages or benefits for students in learning process.

Nowadays, there are many websites and social media to learn English. The students said that they can study English by using Google, Facebook, Viber, Instagram, Youtube and others. They are motivated to learn more as they can access any information and knowledge and learn from the various websites anytime and anywhere. Google is very useful for them because they can get any information they need. The students said that on Google, they can get English books in any format such as IELTS series, face to face and grammar practice book for beginner or pre-intermediate or upper-intermediate students. They can also practice reading skill or British Council website. There are many magazines to read, audio clips to listen the pronunciation of the paragraphs and many questions to answers. So they can get both reading and listening skills. They also said that they can study English through Facebook at the Cambridge Assessment English "Facebook Page". It is updated every day. Moreover, they can see many English learning pages and then they can learn English for these pages.

Then, they can study English by using YouTube. Next, some games can help to improve their English skills. Indeed, online games are a great place for them. They can improve their English skills through games and apps, especially English learning applications. Some games are designed to help learners improve their English language in a fun way. By playing English word puzzle games, they can get more vocabulary.

Table 1 Perception of using technological tools by students

Perception of using technoligal tools	Number of students	%
Very useful, beneficial, happy	43	43
Useful, easy to use	49	49
Moderate	7	7
Not useful, not happy	1	1
Total	100	

Lecturers also get benefit as they can access many teaching material from reputable sites, handy and easy to use in any occasion, either in the class or outside the classrooms. From the perspective of the students, technological tools they use are useful in learning to improve their English Language skills. This advance of technology makes possible those were

impossible in the past. Similarly, those are not enable today may be possible in the future.

6. CONCLUSIONS
Based on this research results, we can conclude that learning English by using technological tools such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Apps are useful and have fun in learning by the students at University of Computer Studies, Mandalay. Moreover, English becomes more interesting as the sophisticated technology becomes available.

The students are eager to learn and to increase most of their time allocation in using these tools for academic purposes, such as listening and other aspect of English language. They are interested and happy to practice and to upgrade the quality of their English competencies. Technology is available to help and give the students opportunity to do more not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.

By knowing the students' weakness, the lecturer should give more practices to the students in order to improve their competencies by using technological tools such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Apps and so on.

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