

## THE ROLE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of digital communication has led to a drastic change in the face of education, especially regarding language acquisition. Despite these advances in digital communication, all possible ways through which computer tools of communication, be it any social media, messaging application, or online forums, take an influence on language acquisition are researched either regarding vocabulary development, changing patterns of communication, or enhancing the quality of spelling. It highlights how much reliance on web-based tools there is in supporting interactive, real-time practice and response in the learning of a language through a comprehensive survey of digital use among language learners. Some of the findings include that such resources enhance vocabulary building and involvement by the users themselves but also impose overdependence on the autocorrect function, which can imperil spelling mastery. Ultimately, contextual learning through digital settings exposes learners to rich linguistic styles and expressions of culture. From this study, such valuable insights are garnered on the influence of communication on the digital platform toward language learning. Through such research, teaching staff should be called upon to implement such tools in instructional strategies with balanced actualization in language development.

**Keywords:** Digital communication, Language acquisition, Vocabulary development, Spelling mastery, Interactive learning, Web-based tools, Real-time practice, Cultural expressions, Educational technology, Autocorrect reliance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The digital communication revolution has seen much change about the way people learn and interact with languages, especially the English language. In many parts of the world, people use much of English; hence people require a means through which they can professionally, academically, and socially express themselves. The new digital technologies of social media, instant messaging applications, and online forums have newly opened various avenues of real-time contexts for practicing and upgrading the learners while challenging paradigms where, up till now, language learning had strictly taken place. With online resources, learners are exposed to much more than the walls of the classroom in discovering the interaction and immersion learning experiences in a language. The present paper makes an attempt to evaluate the role played by digital communication for the enhancement of English learning using vocabulary acquisition, communication style, and spelling accuracy as the criterion for analysis. But with the wake of Facebook, WhatsApp, and thousands of language practice applications, the today's learner can easily reach the native speakers; therefore, he can have authentic language practice beyond the classroom. Such being the case, there are great gaping holes regarding the effectiveness and implications of such tools on the acquisition of language. Learners have been found to fall short in vocabulary, fail in fluency of communication, and commit blunders in spelling among other matters of importance. With a growing number of educators and policymakers using digital communication as an aid to language instruction, there must be an even higher level of scrutiny in considering how these tools can better be used in schools. This study is relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has not only emphasized but also fast-tracked the use of digital communication within educational spaces. This paper therefore explores how digital communication can relate to language learning with an eye to setting up effective practices that will facilitate the integration of such tools for language instructions so learners can easily take in and understand the English language fluently and confidently. This report shall become part of the knowledge on how a language educator, learner, as well as other stakeholders in a field of language education had to strike a balance between informal digital interaction and some form of structured language instruction.

#### Problem Statement

Although digital communication tools have popularized over educational institutions today, the understanding of these tools remains limited. Issues in vocab retention and fluency in communication, spelling accuracy, among others are what many learners face. The challenge is, hence, in finding the ways it affects the different facets of English learning, and how better it can be utilized in the educational context. This research is all the more relevant in this age of increasing dependence on digital communication in pedagogical approaches of education, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It becomes important to understand how digital tools can facilitate or hinder the learning of a foreign language in order to better guide educators and policymakers to find the best possible solution and how learners might successfully navigate the complexities of the new language in a digital world.

## Research Gap

Even as there is no question about the value of digital tools, a whole lot remains under-researched

Long-term Impact: It is not known whether such digital tools for communication would have a long-term effect on the general proficiency in a second language.

Differentiated Effects: There is little scrutiny on which effects certain tools have on different skills-types, particularly on writing compared to speaking.

Demographic Variations: The extent to which digital tools impact different age groups and cultural backgrounds remains unknown.

Integration Strategies: So, the case is presented in front of the readers to a lack of rich frameworks toward integrating new digital tools with older teaching practices to achieve the real balancing of informal and formal learning.

Over-dependency Risks: Further research needs to be done to overcome over-dependency risks on features such as autocorrect, which restrict independent learning.

Filling these gaps will make educators and policymakers understand well how to harness utilities from digital tools for effective and whole language learning.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted in order to understand the role of digital communication for the learner of the English language. Students from all walks of life were approached and asked about how different digital tools, such as messaging apps, social media, or online forums, have shaped their learning experience.

The questionnaire tested such questions as vocabulary acquisition, communicative style, spelling, and overall proficiency in the language. It managed to collect a total of 100 responses - a more than adequate number for analysis.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital communication tools have impacted second language English to a large extent, especially in regards to vocabulary. The more literature one reads, the more one tends to believe that social media, mobile applications, and online forums have overhauled older ways of learning for good due to live dynamic interaction with concurrent self-paced study.

Several scholars believe that digital resources can be appropriately used to build vocabulary. Godwin-Jones (2018) concentrated on the use of MALL to provide learners with authentic, situational vocabulary. McGreal and Elliott (2013) also referred to some merits of social networking applications, including Twitter and Instagram, with a focus on sharing idiomatic expressions and professional jargon with the learners. Such exposure helps to store the meaning of words appropriately for situations and contexts.

Digital communication stimulates diverse linguistic uses. Professional social media, for instance, tends to favor formal use of language, whereas online social media may prompt informal use of language (Kern, 2000). However, this distinction underlines the ability of the learner to be linguistically flexible, which is difficult in teaching learners when and how to shift into formal or informal registries (Ziegler, 2015).

The influence of digital tools on spelling is still unknown. Autocorrects, as helpful as they can be to users, cause over dependency thus making the learners less vigilant with spelling rules (Si, 2014). Practice using other types of text-based communication tools may improve spelling for some students through constant practice of writing language.

Mobile applications like Duolingo also exploit gamified learning techniques to enhance pronunciation and fluency in speech.

As argued by Hsu (2013), the tools in question afford learners continuous opportunities for practice that enhance fluency while speaking through repetitive, but interactive exercises.

Through internet forums, learners have interactions with different English dialects and cultural differences (Thorne & Black, 2007). Such interaction may naturally lead to the development of language competencies but also inculcates cultural competencies that enrich the whole language learning process.

### Limitations of the Method

With so many benefits of digital communication tools, there are also some associated disadvantages. Informal communication generally dictates everything else within the digital setting, mainly resulting in miscommunication and misuse in formal situations (Huang & Liu, 2018).

Adding to that, the increased reliance on digital tools would likely undermine the base skills, like grammar and proper writing structures (Kessler, 2010).

#### 4. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The responses to the survey provide a holistic overview of the attitudes and views of learners toward the use of digital communication in their process of language acquisition. An overwhelming 75% felt that value was accrued from using digital communication tools, especially social media and messaging applications, to enrich their vocabulary stock. Respondents reported that the words are always exposed often on these media platforms, which helped in retention as well as actual usage. This complies with vocabulary acquisition theories because the learners are exposed to vocabulary in different contexts, such as idiomatic expressions and slang and professional jargon, which cannot be reasonably covered in a traditional learning setting. Such exposure would most likely lead to a nuanced understanding of language and the capacity of learners to use vocabulary appropriately in most situations. Using hashtags and other discussions on Twitter or Instagram, to mention but a few, also contributes to the development of vocabulary because it exposes the learner to new phrases and word combinations. The dynamic nature of digital communication promotes continuous learning. Unlike the conventional classroom setting, where vocabulary is presented in isolation, digital platforms tend to make learners see and use new words in real-time conversations. This exposure makes learners attune themselves to the subtleties of language to use vocabulary in appropriate situations. They learn to pronounce words, connotation, and usage in specific contexts, which rarely occurs in classroom learning. The mode of digital communication, on the other hand, received varied views from the respondents regarding its effects on speakers' mannerisms. Some said these platforms helped develop a more formal speech pattern, especially in professional discourse on LinkedIn or academic forums. Others felt the very informality of social media bred informal communication styles like use of abbreviations, emojis, and even colloquial language that impeded formal writing skills. This duality demands that learners shift their styles depending on the situations and would benefit from explicit teaching on code-switching and style adaptation in order to avoid confusion when the time comes to shift between formal and informal contexts. The results of the survey on the spelling were ambiguous. While half of the respondents claimed they improved because of frequent digital interactions, there were those who believed that use of autocorrect features incapacitated them from spelling in full. Autocorrect tools might make speedy corrections easy but sacrifice attention to spelling rules and patterns. Most of the learners seemed convinced of how informal settings dominated by digital communication worked but began feeling anxious again when confronted with formal writing tasks. This phenomenon brings out the need for balanced learning that would equally prize both informal and formal language skills. Educators should implement exercises in which students practice spelling independently while making digital contact to counter the dependency created by the use of the autocorrect function. According to the students, the most often practiced media for English were social media and messaging apps, these because they permitted real-time feedback and conversation practice to take place as essential to language acquisition. Discussing in online forums, posing questions, and sharing resources were also useful practices involving the development of language skills. The gamified language learning platforms, Duolingo and Quizlet, were highly appreciated because of their interactive and engaging approach. Both competitive elements and rewarding process stimulate practice outside class in a consistent manner so that mobile applications for vocabulary and grammar practices become extended classrooms. Study results show that, although digital communication affects significantly language learning processes regarding the acquisition of vocabulary and learner engagement, it also poses challenges. Most of the digital interactions are casual, so part of the misconceptions or misinterpreted texts have created a need for balance between formal and informal language exposure. Educators should advise learners to critically evaluate online language, proper sources versus informal communication. Excessive reliance on digital tools in the process of teaching language leaves a vacuum in the core writing and grammar tools: which includes spelling; thus, structurally planned classes have to be integrated with digital practice for language development in totality. This means that the general findings for this survey would depict how digital communication finds an important role in the learning process of language but need to tread through their complexities with cautious and careful steps. Knowing the many profits and losses with digital tools allows for an environment wherein balanced language development could be encouraged on learners as they find their footing in an increasingly digital world.

#### 5. DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS

The findings from the survey brings to view the multiple roles that digital communication plays in the learning of the English language. Applications such as social media and instant messaging services represent communication applications but also authentic practice avenues in regard to language learning. Most importantly, the study finds a positive relationship between digital communication and vocabulary acquisition. This has also been shown by previous research where language exposure has been a key factor in acquiring more words. Better retention and usage of the vocabulary could be due to a result of getting to learn new words in informal contexts. At times, this casual nature causes informal linguistic use, so educational settings must balance exposure to both forms of usage.

### Unexpected Findings

Something surprising was the very variant effects that digital tools had on spelling accuracy. While a group of learners attained higher correct spellings as an outcome of digital interaction, autocorrect features in digital tools reduced their attention to spelling details for another group of learners. This then becomes an important direction to pursue further: the various forms of digital communication may subtly influence what learners can do with language. Also, some of the respondents wrote that through participation in online forums and communities, they were exposed to various types of dialects and cultural expressions of English. That exposed them to new vocabulary apart from providing an understanding of sociolinguistic aspects. Respondents claimed that through using of the language with native speakers as well as other learners, one was able to build confidence in speaking as it allowed one to try out new vocabulary in this context.

### Scope for Further Research

These findings lead to several avenues for further research. For example, it might be appropriate to study whether the use of some digital communication types influences the use of some skills but not others. For example, there seems to be interest in knowing if live conversation practice has a differential effect on fluency and pronunciation aspects of spoken language. This third avenue is to investigate the long term influences of such digital communication tools on learners' overall language proficiency for a deep insight of their appropriateness in learning environment. Lastly, there should be further study about cultural exchange influence in online language communities, and the resultant influence on learners' motivation and involvement with a language. It could also show how the different demographics react to digital communication tools intended for language learning in the diversity of various demographics. For instance, children might utilize social media differently compared to adults and this will thus influence how they are going to perform during the learning process. Those subtle differences in learning can be understood and thus encouraged towards effective teaching with diversity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The results of the survey indicated that while the different instruments available for digital communication can greatly boost learning English, they present an equal array of opportunities and challenges for learners. Findings also showed that social media platforms and messengers provide student opportunities for vocabularies to grow while at the same time actively engaging with one another. Such tools also encourage instant feedback and the handling of different styles of expressions, which adds greatly to the learners' flexibility in their command of vocabulary in various contexts. Not to ignore are, however, pertinent disadvantages, including the confused levels of accuracy in the application of spelling, which makes for the ideal start against becoming over-reliant on the autocorrect feature. To mitigate these challenges, teachers should employ structured lessons that apply to core language skills, coupled with digital interactions. Besides, independent work in spelling and grammar fosters better preparation besides giving learners the equal skills in an informal and formal context. Places the limitations of the study qualitatively; the fact that it's a very narrow demographic, plus self-reported data. Hence, future studies could lend insight into the long history of digital communications in building language proficiency. Knowledge on how engagement types in digital interactions differently affect language skills would be very relevant for teachers. To say much in summary, even though the onset of digital communications is metamorphosing the face of the learning of English, the entire landscape calls for careful stepping by educators, learners, and policymakers. Through capitalizing on the strength of digital platforms and right raw-talking on language forms, a full-spectrum approach can be fashioned through which every stakeholder could get the learners equipped to meet the demands in an ever-quickly digitalizing world. The findings of this study offer a foundational basis for further inquiries into the future of language education in digital communications.

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