



Use of Technology Resources to Enhance EFL Speaking Skills in Bangladesh: Exploring Learner Perceptions

Research Paper

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Abstract

Modern technology provides learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) easy access to various learning resources. Different technology resources are widely used in the field of language teaching and learning as they help the learners to improve their skills. Specifically, the use of technology resources including internet, multimedia projection system, video lessons on different applications, language translation applications, online dictionaries, etc. can play a crucial role in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL learners because they foster greater interaction in the classroom and outside of the classroom. In this case, technology resources can be used not as the substitute for the classroom teacher but as an additional learning tool. Therefore, this paper reports on a study that investigated the perceptions of the students about the uses of the internet and modern technologies to improve English speaking skills. This study was based on a questionnaire survey. The participants of this study were 30 MA students from the department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The results revealed that most of the students had a positive attitude towards using the existing technologies to develop their speaking skills.

Keywords: Modern technology, resources, EFL learner, speaking skills.

1. Introduction

'Speaking' is an essential tool for communicating and interacting with others. It is considered as one of the most important skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Good speaking skill is the act of generating words that can be understood by the listeners. According to Brown and Yule (1983), speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensively. Therefore, the students must be able to speak in English in the real world outside the classroom as well. In the 21st century, various innovative modern technologies are being introduced to teach and learn spoken English both inside and outside classrooms. Technology is the vehicle to get access to this modernized world. Even technologies such as, internet, educational audio and video lessons, video conferencing system, different

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language learning software, multimedia computer software, mobile phones, and telecommunication system, social communication media, etc. are indispensable tools that teachers and the learners of English Language can use to teach and learn language speaking skills very effectively. Department of English, University of Dhaka has two seminar libraries on the first floor and a computer lab on the ground floor, where there are many desktops and those computers have connections to the internet. Students have access to all of these places. The MA students of this department have technological support from the institution authority. They have technological equipment, internet access, multimedia computer software both inside and outside of the classroom. But speaking skill is not only a matter of availability of technological resources. To stay abreast it is important to exploit all the resources available and mold the learners to use the technology at their disposal for their benefit. Students have to update their knowledge by using modern technologies. Otherwise they will be relegated in the real world.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to look for the availability of technological equipment and practical and theoretical implications of effective use of the technologies in English Language teaching (ELT) to improve oral communicative abilities enhancing EFL speaking skills of the students and also their overall perceptions about this aspect.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Speaking

Among all the four key language skills, speaking is one of the most important language skills. According to Ur (1996), speaking included all other skills of knowing that language. Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney & Burk, 1998, p. 13). Some categories that can be used as the role of learners in developing speaking skills in the classroom according to Brown, (1994) (as cited in Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014): Intensive, Responsive, Transactional, Interpersonal, and Extensive. The Intensive category includes any speaking activities that are designed to practice phonological or grammatical aspects of language. On the other hand, the Responsive category can be short replies that can occur in interactive language classes. To convey or exchange specific information learners can use Transactional language. Sometimes it is considered as dialogue. The Interpersonal category is also considered as dialogue although it carries out more of the purpose of maintaining social connection rather than the transmission of information. For example, colloquial language, casual registers, etc. The Extensive is considered as monologue. It is more formal and deliberative.

3.2. Accuracy and Fluency

To develop speaking skill a learner must obtain accuracy and fluency. These are the two important skills that can determine the success of the spoken English of the learners. Accuracy refers to how to correct learners' use of the language system is, including their use of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Accuracy is often compared to fluency. Especially, when we talk about a learner's level of speaking.

Again, according to Nunan (2003), to use a language quickly and effectively with few unusual pauses, is called fluency. Therefore, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to exactly investigate the factors, components and conditions that form the base of effective speaking. Effective instructions inferred from the deliberate analysis of this area. Sufficient language input and speech promotional activities will help students speak the English language fluently and appropriately (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

3.3. Use of Modern Technologies to improve Speaking Skills

Sokolik (2001) observes in one of her works, technologies are now used as instruments for communication rather than ways of delivering automated drills. The internet has brought an excellent change in the field of teaching and enhancing English learning. Smith (1997) mentions the term *virtual realia* in one of his studies to refer to authentic material in the language learning process. To say more explicitly, in language teaching and learning digitized items, objects and pictures from the target culture are brought into the classroom as examples. These aids are used to stimulate spoken language production. In another study, Ganesan & Shalini (2011) mentioned about videoconferencing for enhancing speaking skills saying that there is a method of one person accessing the speeches of another person remotely. It is a kind of live relay of a program. More often it is used to listen to the live lecture of a professor who resides in a foreign country. It can be very helpful for the remote students who can listen to the live audio from a distance.

Videotapes are also useful to enhance speaking skills. Videotape with or without script makes the students get access to the pronunciation, accent and word usage of English with their own interest. There is a method that makes the learners repeat difficult words from their own places voluntarily (Ganesan and Shalini 2011). With the help of the internet, learners can find a lot of learning materials, audio and video lessons, voice recordings, language games, quizzes, etc. This is how learners get exposed to the target language which definitely helps them to develop their speaking skills. According to Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014), online teaching inside the classroom seems to be interesting. It makes the students to find out the suitable materials for them. Students are instructed to do the grammar exercises which are available online. Through Internet teachers can collect data from various sources for different instructions. To improve speaking students can use different applications like Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Google Hangouts, Cisco WebEx through which students can connect with professors, friends, and even native speakers of English. These ways of learning have been observed to improve the oral proficiency of students. It is helpful where is lacking of native speakers. Besides, online conferences and classes develop intercultural awareness, motivation and raise the level of communication.

Therefore, it is evident that all the studies mentioned above are showing there is a connection between modern technologies and the development of speaking skills. But it is not constant that the connection can always lead to a positive outcome. The results can be negative as well. If the methods are not appropriate in the classroom while using the technologies for teaching and learning, if the activities are not proper, and if the institution does not provide adequate and suitable technologies to the students it might lead to failure by the wastage of time, money and energy. Taking all these things into consideration, this study attempts to identify the perceptions of the MA students of the Department of English.

4. Methodology

This study is a quantitative survey research. For the purpose of investigating the useful technologies for speaking skills, the availability of the technological equipment, and the perceptions of the participants towards using and utilizing the technological equipment, an 18-item questionnaire were distributed among the participants. The questionnaire was made especially for the participants taking all the situational, contextual and authoritative things in mind. The questionnaire contained yes-no types of items, multiple-choice items, and five-point Likert scale items were also used. The questionnaire was divided into four sub-sections:

- a. Technological supports inside the institution
- b. Availability of the technological equipment in the classroom
- c. Technologies outside of the classroom
- d. Overall perceptions of the participants

5. Limitation

The study was conducted on a small number of participants in a very short time. If the study was conducted on a large number of students with different groups of participants, the results might fluctuate from the current results. Open or semi-structured interviews followed by theme analyses could be taken for exploring complex issues involving perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, etc. Therefore, further researches are also needed with more elaborate instruments and on a large number of students.

6. Results and Findings

6.1. Technological Support Inside the Institution

This section shows the technological supports that were provided by the institution. The students were asked in the item no.1.1 (MCQ type) of the questionnaire that whether the institution provided technological support for the students or not. The majority of the participants (50%) responded that the technology that the institution provided was limited. A good number of the participants (44%) responded that those technological supports were only accessible during office hours. Item number 1.2 indicates that a large number of students (96.7%) responded that they have access to the internet inside their institute, which is a positive tendency towards the exposure to the technologies.

6.2. Availability of Technological Equipment in the Classrooms

This section of the results focuses on the availability of technological equipment inside the classrooms. The findings of the item 2.1 (MCQ type) indicated the availability of the technologies that could be used for improving speaking skills. 27% of the participants marked that the projection system was available in some classrooms. 20% of the participants acknowledged that video lessons on different apps (e.g. YouTube) were shown during their class time, in some classrooms, which is a positive finding. 15% replied that the video conferencing system was not used in any classroom. However, 15% of the participants marked that desktops were available in some classrooms. Other 15% also marked that mobile phones were allowed in all classrooms. These percentages indicate that they have self-access to the internet data in the classrooms. This section is showing the findings of item no. 2.2. The participants were asked how often the technology that they marked above was present in the classes. The majority of the students (56.7%) answered those types of equipment were sometimes present in the classroom. Another 33.3% of participants answered that those equipment were most often present during class time.

6.3. Technologies outside of the Classroom

The participants were asked to give their opinion about which technology seemed the most suitable for them to develop their English-speaking skills in item no. 3.1. The options given to them were, videotapes on different applications (e.g. YouTube), video conferencing, social communication media (e.g. Viber, Imo, Messenger), mobile phones and telecommunication, language learning software and online dictionaries. 34.5% of the participants responded that according to their perception, watching videotapes on different Apps (e.g. YouTube) was the most suitable technology to develop their English-speaking skills. Another 24.1% of the participants answered that mobile phones and telecommunication systems seemed helpful for them to learn and practice the English language. The findings of item no. 3.2 indicated that a greater part of the participants (46.7%) used technologies to develop their speaking skills outside of the classroom. It showed that they are confident enough to communicate with others in English outside of their classrooms.

On the other hand, item no. 3.3 is indicated that the majority of the participants think that they had good (33.3%) and very good (33.3%) skill of speaking English which is obviously a positive indication. In item no. 3.4 the participants were asked to what extent they felt confident while speaking in English (Oral communication through internet/mobile phones and others) with the help of technology in different situations. The findings of 3.4 showed the majority (16%) responded that they feel confident to speak in English (audio/video conversations) while they do social networking. 14% of the students feel confident to speak in English using technology with friends, 13% of the students feel somewhat confident with parents, and 15% feel somewhat confident while talking with teachers in English through different kinds of technology.

6.4. Overall Perceptions of the participants

This section of the paper deals with the overall perceptions and attitudes towards using the technologies both inside and outside of the classroom. A five-point Likert scale was used for item no. 4.1 to 4.9, in which 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly disagree.

Table 1: Overall Perception of the Students of Using Technology (item. 4.1-4.4)

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
	%	%	%	%	%	
4.1	10	30	23.3	30	6.7	2.67
4.2	10	73.3	10	6.7	0	2.76
4.3	0	0	10	53.3	36.7	4.27
4.4	30	30	20	20	0	2.3

Here, 4 items of the questionnaire go under Table 1. The results of item no. 4.1 show that 30% of the students do not feel nervous when they speak in English in any kind of audio/video conversation online. In item number 4.2 majority of the students (73.3%) disagreed with the statement that uses of technology for speaking skills can be time-consuming and less effective. It indicates an optimistic attitude towards using technology in speaking skills. In item no. 4.3, 53.3% of the participants agreed that they feel confident while they give presentations with the help of technology (e.g. projection system, audiovisual equipment etc.). In item no. 4.4 maximum participants disagree (30%) and strongly disagree (30%) with the statement which stated that listening to radio or audio records in English is not helpful for them to develop their speaking skill. The overall mean of this section is 3 showing the participants' enthusiastic attitude towards using technology.

Table 2: Overall Perception of the Students of Using Technology (item 4.5-4.9)

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
	%	%	%	%	%	
4.5	0	6.7	16.7	53.3	23.3	3.93
4.6	43.5	47.8	4.3	4.3	0	1.69
4.7	0	6.7	16.7	53.3	23.3	3.93
4.8	21.7	52.2	17.4	8.7	0	2.13
4.9	43.5	47.8	4.3	3.3	0	1.69

Here, 5 items of the questionnaire go under Table 2. In item no. 4.5 the majority (53.3%) responded that using spoken English software (available online) can be effective for the students of their level. In item no. 4.6 a large number of the students (47.8% and 43.5%) answered that they prefer technology-based interactive classes rather than traditional lecture-based classes. In item 4.7, the majority (53.3%) responded that they watch online video lessons to improve their speaking skills. In item no. 4.8, 52.2% of the students' perception was that using language gaming software is not a time-wasting job to improve speaking skills.

Finally, in item no. 4.9 majority (43.5% & 47.8%) of the participants supported the utilization of online dictionaries to correct pronunciation. The overall mean of this section is 2.67 which is indicating the effectiveness of the technologies according to the participants' perceptions.

7. Discussion and Analyses

The data drawn from the analysis showed that most of the students were fairly familiar with the technologies which were available for them. The institution provides them access to the internet and other modern equipment both inside and outside of the classrooms. Although most of the students responded that they had limited access or they could only access during office hours, still it seemed helpful for them. Nevertheless, some students are from rural areas. All of the are not familiar with different types of technologies such as, multimedia software, language learning applications, etc. If there were more training programs and conferences on technology, the poor students who come from the rural area and not familiar with the technologies could become proficient in speaking by using the multimedia software for their oral presentation and by playing audiovisual speaking tutorials from the internet.

The participants responded that they could take mobile phones in all the classrooms. It means that they have self-access to the data and they can use it according to their choice during the class time. According to the responses of the participants there was no video conferencing system present at that time. If it was present, the students could participate in different kinds of quizzes and interact with the students of the different parts of the world. Apart from that, it is a positive indication that the use of technology which the students marked in the questionnaire was present most of the time in their classrooms. Technologies can make the lesson interesting. Moreover, most of the students marked that they like the interactive technology-based classrooms rather than traditional lecture-based classrooms.

Spoken language usually has two functions: interactional and transactional. The essential goal of the former is to keep social relationships, but that of the latter is to pass information and ideas. Because much of our daily communication is interactional, being able to interact is imperative. Thus, language instructors should facilitate learners with meaningful communicative situations about proper topics by applying learner-learner interaction as the key to teach communicative language (Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, most of the students marked that they use different kinds of technologies to develop their speaking skills and they are pretty confident about their own speaking skills. An important part of the analysis is that most of the students feel confident enough while they communicate with friends, parents, teachers with the help of technology.

The students showed quite positive attitude towards using technologies to develop speaking skills. Most of them marked that they use online dictionaries for correct pronunciation. They use different language learning software to be more grammatically accurate and they practice more conversations in social media, mobile phones and watch video lessons to gain fluency.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper attempted to outline some of the trends of developing speaking skills in a technology-enhanced language learning situation and the perceptions of MA students of the Department of English, University of Dhaka. The following concluding remarks and recommendations can be recorded. Although the authority gives them access to the technology and they have self-access to modern technologies, it is not enough to develop their speaking skills. The institution should modernize its technical instruction capabilities by using new types equipment for supporting the teaching process and the students need to practice more and more

and must utilize the equipment properly for their educational purposes. As listening and speaking are the two fundamental and interrelated skills of language, the students need to practice listening as well. Nevertheless, students must be careful while using technologies, as finding the right content might not be easy all the time. They need to make sure that they are not overusing the internet facilities and not wasting their time on inappropriate materials.

Finally, modern technical ways should be followed for effective learning and teaching of the speaking skills. Besides, English language teachers should encourage their students to use technology in developing their speaking skill. Technological tools are much more interesting and provide fun and enjoyable learning, motivating the students, and help them to enhance their language learning in a fruitful way. Moreover, these tools help students to learn at their own pace and promote autonomy in them. With increasing experience of both the technology and the users of that technology, it is certain that more appropriate technology-based foreign and second language learning systems for enhancing speaking skills will emerge.

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