Exploring the Effectiveness of Online Language Learning Platforms in Developing Speaking Skills at the Tertiary Level

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Background and Context

With the rapid advancement of technology, online language-learning platforms have become increasingly popular. Language learning has always been a crucial component of education. (Alfter et al., 2023). These platforms are especially appealing to tertiary students because they give them the comfort and flexibility to learn languages whenever and wherever they want. While many websites that teach languages make claims about how well they improve speaking abilities, it's important to evaluate these claims. This study investigates how well tertiary-level speaking abilities can be developed using online language learning tools.

Statement of the Problem:

Despite the platforms for learning languages online becoming more popular, there needs to be more thorough research to determine how well they work to improve speaking abilities. The existing research mainly emphasises the overall efficacy of online language learning while ignoring the particular speaking skill. Therefore, determining whether online language learning platforms successfully improve speaking proficiency among tertiary-level students is necessary to fill this research gap.

Research Objectives:

The following are the study's primary goals:

- To assess how well online language learning tools improve tertiary students' speaking abilities.

- To pinpoint the elements that affect how effective or ineffective online language learning platforms are at fostering speaking abilities.

- To look into how students feel about using online platforms for language learning to improve their speaking abilities.

Significance of the Study

This study has several implications for language teachers, students, and creators of online language learning platforms. First and foremost, it will add to the body of knowledge by shedding light on how well speaking skills are developed using online language learning platforms. The results of this study will aid educators in making decisions about how to incorporate online platforms into their methods of teaching languages.

Additionally, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of these platforms can help students use the resources at their disposal more efficiently. Finally, the findings can be used by the creators of online language learning platforms to enhance those platforms and better serve the needs of students looking to improve their speaking abilities.

Research Questions

The following inquiries will direct the study to fulfil its objectives:

➢ How well do tertiary-level speaking skills get developed using online language learning tools?

➢ What are students' opinions and experiences using online language learning tools to improve their speaking abilities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Speaking Skills Development in Tertiary Education

Speaking abilities are particularly important for language learning and communication in tertiary education. (Weng, & Chiu, 2023). Effective oral communication skills are necessary for tertiary students' academic success, professional development, and social interactions. Gaining vocabulary and grammar skills and the ability to express thoughts clearly and confidently in discussions and presentations are all part of developing speaking skills. Therefore, it is crucial to research efficient methods and equipment that support speaking ability growth in tertiary education.

The Role of Technology in Language Learning

Technology has transformed language learning by giving students various tools and resources to accelerate their language learning. Recent years have seen a rise in the use of technology in language learning, which has many advantages, including accessibility, interactivity, and flexibility. (Ruiz Hernández,2019). With the help of technology, students can practice speaking in a safe environment, get immediate feedback, and access various multimedia resources to improve their speaking abilities. Online language learning platforms are a technological development that has drawn much attention in language education.

Online Language Learning Platforms and Their Features

Online language learning platforms are web-based tools that give students interactive readings, activities, and exercises to help them learn languages. (Khenioui, Belouahem, 2020). These platforms provide a range of features intended to improve the development of speaking abilities. Common features include speech recognition technology for virtual speaking practice, video conferencing for in-person interaction with teachers or other students, multimedia content for practising listening and pronouncing words, and peer collaboration through discussion boards or group projects. Even outside conventional classroom settings, these features allow students to practice speaking in a meaningful and real-world setting.

Previous Research on the Effectiveness of Online Language Learning Platforms for Speaking Skill Development:

Numerous studies have examined how speaking abilities can be developed using online language learning tools. (Troussas, et al 2019). Previous studies have emphasised the benefits of online learning environments, including increased learner motivation, autonomy, and chances for individualised instruction. Studies have also shown that incorporating speech recognition technology into online platforms can give learners useful feedback, assisting in improving oral fluency and pronunciation. (Barrot, 2021). Through virtual interactions with target language speakers, online platforms have been found to support cooperative learning and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, prior research has also identified some restrictions and difficulties related to online language-learning platforms, despite these encouraging results. According to some studies, speech recognition software has technical problems that lead to inaccurate results. (Barnwal & Tiwary,2020). The lack of face-to-face and non-verbal cues on online platforms may make it more difficult to hone speaking abilities like body language and gestures. (Randall 2019). In addition, there is a shortage of research on how well-speaking abilities are developed at the tertiary level when using online language learning platforms.

Methodology

Participants: This study included 60 students of Villupuram's Arignar Anna Government Arts College (AAGAC). The sample was chosen based on their enrollment in tertiary-level language courses and prior usage of online language learning platforms.

Research Design: For this study, a quantitative research design was used. The goal was to compile information on the efficiency of online language learning tools for improving speaking abilities. The research's methodology centred on distributing a questionnaire to students to gather information about their perceptions and experiences using these platforms.
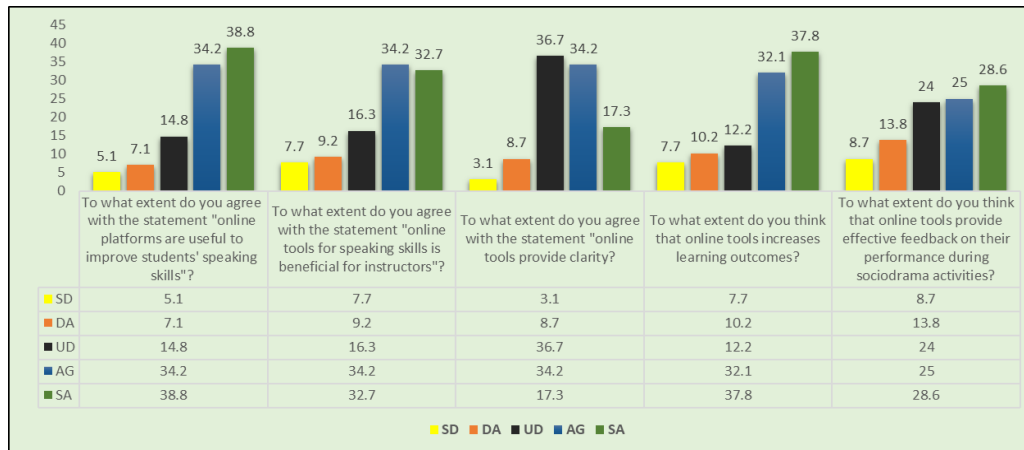
Data Collection: A questionnaire was the main tool for gathering data for this study. Five Likert-scale questions were included in the survey to collect quantitative information on students' opinions on how well speaking skills are improved using online language learning tools. According to the Likert scale, a score of 1 meant "strongly disagree," and five meant "strongly agree." The participants received the questionnaire electronically or on paper, depending on their preferences.

Table-1 Likert Scale Questionnaire

S.No	Description	SD	DA	UD	AG	SA	Mean	Std.D
	Table - 1.1							
1	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online platforms are useful to improve students' speaking skills"?	5.1	7.1	14.8	34.2	38.8	3.94	1.13
2	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online tools for speaking skills is beneficial for instructors"?	7.7	9.2	16.3	34.2	32.7	3.75	1.22
3	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online tools provide clarity?	3.1	8.7	36.7	34.2	17.3	3.54	0.97
4	To what extent do you think that online tools increases learning outcomes?	7.7	10.2	12.2	32.1	37.8	3.82	1.25
5	To what extent do you think that online tools provide effective feedback on their performance during sociodrama activities?	8.7	13.8	24	25	28.6	3.51	1.27
	SD-Strongly disagree, DA-Disagree, UD-Undecided, AG-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree							

Figure-1.1 Results

	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online platforms are useful to improve students' speaking skills"?	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online tools for speaking skills is beneficial for instructors"?	To what extent do you agree with the statement "online tools provide clarity?	To what extent do you think that online tools increases learning outcomes?	To what extent do you think that online tools provide effective feedback on their performance during sociodrama activities?
SD	5.1	7.7	3.1	7.7	8.7
DA	7.1	9.2	8.7	10.2	13.8
UD	14.8	16.3	36.7	12.2	24
AG	34.2	34.2	34.2	32.1	25
SA	38.8	32.7	17.3	37.8	28.6

SD ▢ DA ▢ UD ▢ AG ▢ SA

Analysis

The survey aims to learn people's perspectives on the value of online platforms and tools for enhancing students' communication abilities, assisting teachers, enhancing learning outcomes, and providing useful feedback during sociodrama activities. The statements use a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (SD) to strongly agree (SA), to determine the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with these topics (SA). This survey aims to learn more about respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards using online resources for teaching and learning languages. Researchers and educators can learn more about the effectiveness of online tools and pinpoint areas that still need work by collecting data on these aspects.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

The survey aimed to gauge respondents' attitudes and perceptions about the value of online platforms and tools for enhancing students' public speaking abilities, assisting teachers, enhancing learning outcomes, and providing useful feedback during sociodrama activities. Several statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, comparative analysis, and correlation analysis, were used to analyse the collected data. According to descriptive statistics, the respondents had a moderate agreement, with the mean responses for all items ranging from 3.51 to 3.94. The standard deviations ranged from 0.97 to 1.27, indicating that each item's responses were evenly dispersed. The respondents' perceptions of using online platforms and tools for language learning and teaching were generally moderately positive. The results of the hypothesis testing showed that, for every item, the mean responses significantly deviated from the Likert

scale's neutral point (3). This result suggests that the respondents' opinions were more inclined to agree or disagree with the statements rather than being neutral. The chi-square test results also showed strong correlations between respondents' levels of agreement and the statements, suggesting that respondents' attitudes varied according to the topic being addressed.

The comparison of the statements revealed some intriguing discrepancies. For instance, compared to other statements, the one about instructors using online tools received a relatively higher mean response (3.75), indicating a more favourable perception. Conversely, the statement about the clarity of online tools received a relatively lower mean response (3.54), indicating a marginally less favourable perception among the respondents. The relationships between the items may be better understood with the help of correlation analysis. For instance, examining the relationship between students' advancement in speaking abilities and teachers' perceptions of the advantages of online tools could shed light on these tools' potential influence on student and teacher experiences.

Conclusion

According to the analysis of the survey results, most respondents have favourable opinions of using online resources and tools for teaching and learning languages. The results imply that online tools can help students develop their speaking abilities while benefiting teachers. However, there was a slightly less positive perception of the clarity offered by online tools and their effect on learning outcomes. These findings highlight the significance of effectively integrating online tools into language education. In addition to addressing any issues with clarity and learning outcomes, educators and instructional designers should maximise the advantages mentioned in the questionnaire, such as enhancing speaking abilities and offering instructor support.

Further investigation into the relationships between various factors can aid in a better understanding of how online tools affect methods for teaching and learning languages. It's critical to remember that the analysis is based on the precise sample of respondents who answered the questionnaire. Future research should consider a larger and more varied sample to ensure generalizability. Nevertheless, the results offer insightful information that can aid decision-making and direct the creation and use of online platforms and tools to improve language learning experiences.

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