



Investigating the effect of modern tools on improving English language teaching

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Abstract

This paper aimed at investigating the impact of modern tools on improving English language learning. The study is descriptive in nature. It used a sample of two closely related groups; the students of English and the teachers of English. The first group was made up of 30 students; the second was made up of 10 teachers. Two data collection tools were used; (a) a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire for the students, and (b) a structured interview for the teachers. The data from the questionnaire were treated statistically using SPSS program. The weighted means for the individual items and for the whole aspects of the tool were calculated. The data from the interview were analyzed qualitatively. The results were used to answer the study questions and to verify the hypotheses. The study came out with the results that (a) modern tools have a significant positive impact on the students' language performance, (b) modern tools result in positive attitudes towards learning English language, and (c) teachers are aware of the importance of modern tools in teaching and learning English. The paper offered two recommendations concerning the training of students to transform their positive attitudes into action and the training of teachers to employ modern tools effectively in order to match the needs and expectations of the students. The paper also suggested two areas for further research: (a) the role of modern tools in narrowing the gap between the teachers' practices and the students' expectations, and (b) the role of modern tools in developing the 21st Century skills.

Keywords: modern tools, language performance, attitudes, awareness, training

1. Introduction

This paper aims at investigation the impact of educational modern tools on enhancing the quality of learning of English language. At the outset, it is imperative to explain what is meant by the term "modern tools" as is used in this paper.

In order to define the term, two questions have to be answered here:

1. What are these tools?
2. Why are they modern?

Firstly, the word 'tools' here is used as an umbrella term that covers a number of techniques and technologies that are employed in teaching English languages. These techniques and technologies can be grouped under two labels:

1. Pedagogical techniques such as language games role-play activities, simulations, and drama.
2. Electronic devices that are used in multimedia approaches to learning such as videos, computers, smart devices, and interactive boards.

Secondly, the word 'modern' here does not refer to the 'tools' per se. obviously; both categories of 'tools' are not 'modern' in the strict meaning of the word. They have been used in teaching and learning for a long time now. They are 'modern' in the sense that they are now used within the context of the most recent developments in educational psychology. These developments have occurred as a result of the drastic changes that have taken place in a number of issues and fields such as the changing concept of the nature of language, the

corresponding notion of the nature of language learning, and

the new realities created by the demands of the today's world; just to name a few.

2. Literature Review

This review will be focused on the two aspects that underpin the use of modern tools viz. cooperative learning and e-learning.

2.1 What is cooperative learning?

Cooperative learning (also known as collaborative learning) can be defined as "The instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, p. 9) [9]. Also Jacobs, Power, and Lon (2002, p. 1) define it as "Principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively."

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, cooperative learning is:

An approach to teaching and learning in which classrooms are organized so that students work together in small co-operative teams. Such an approach to learning is said to increase students' learning since (a) it is less threatening for many students, (b) it increases the amount of student participation in the classroom, (c) it reduces the need for competitiveness, and (d) it reduces the teacher's dominance in the classroom.

So, cooperative learning can be seen as an approach that pumps the blood of life in the veins of the traditional educational techniques and makes them better tools that can match the needs and goals of today's generations.

2.2 Cooperative learning and L2

Cooperative learning has its roots firmly set in the well-established theories of L2 instruction. Some of these are:

2.2.1 The input hypothesis

The Input Hypothesis assumes that L2 acquisition is driven by comprehensible input (Krashen and Terrell, 1983, p97) [10]. In other words, learners acquire language when they understand input that they are exposed to. To look at this from the point of view of cooperative learning, input from the members of the group may be more likely to be comprehensible. This is because the level of their language may be roughly equal. Krashen and Terrell (1983) [10] argue that peer input is useful since "does a great deal more well than harm, as long as it is not the only input the students are exposed to. It is comprehensible, it is communicative, and in many cases, for many students it contains examples of i+1 [language slightly above students' current level of competence]".

2.2.2 The interaction hypothesis

The Interaction Hypothesis (Hatch, 1978; Long, 1981) [7, 11] underscores the role of social interaction in increasing the amount of comprehensible input that students get. This is due to the fact that the collaborative setting in groups and the trust that can grow among the members make it more likely that students will have opportunities to repair comprehension breakdowns.

2.2.3 The output hypothesis

The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) [15] states that while comprehensible input is necessary for L2 learning, learners also need to speak and to write, i.e., produce output, in their L2. Cooperative learning offers students many opportunities for output.

2.3 Some techniques used in cooperative learning

A great number of cooperative techniques have been developed (Jacobs, Power, and Loh, 2002; Kagan, 1994; Sharan, 1994). Below, three simple cooperative learning techniques are described.

2.3.1 Circle of Speakers

- In groups of 2-4, students take turns to speak. Several such rotating turns can be taken.
- Students listen as their partner(s) speak and perhaps take notes, ask questions, or give feedback.
- The teacher randomly chooses some students and asks them to tell the class what their partner(s) said.
- This technique can also be done with students taking turns to write, or they can write and speak at each turn.

2.3.2 Write-Pair-Switch

- Each student works alone to write answers.
- In pairs, students share answers.
- Students switch partners and share their former partner's ideas with their new partner.

2.3.3 Question-and-Answer Pairs

- Ss work alone to write one or more questions.
- They write answers to their questions on a separate sheet of paper.
- Ss exchange questions but not answers.
- After Ss have answered their partner's questions, they compare answers.

2.4 What is e-learning?

E-learning refers to the use of information and communication technologies to enable the access to online learning/teaching resources. In its broadest sense, Abbad *et al* (2009) [11], defined E-learning to mean any learning that is enabled electronically. They however narrowed this definition down to mean learning that is empowered by the use of digital technologies.

The European Commission (2001) [5] describes, e-Learning as the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to increase learning quality by easing access to facilities and services as well as distant exchanges and collaboration. The following are also different definitions of e-learning.

Also according to Wentling *et al* (2000) [18] the term e-learning refers to the attainment and use of knowledge that are predominantly facilitated and distributed by electronic means. To them, the e-learning depends on computers and networks, but it is likely it will progress into systems comprising of a variety of channels such as wireless and satellite, and technologies such as cellular phones (Wentling *et al.*, 2000) [18].

2.5 Advantages of e-learning

Some of the advantages that the adoption of e-learning in education, obtained from review of literature includes the

following:

1. It is flexible in relation to time and place. Students can choose the place and time that suits them (Smedley, 2010) [14].
2. It can provide opportunities for relations between students by the use of discussion forums. In this way, it helps eliminate barriers that can hinder participation including the fear of talking to other students.
3. E-learning motivates students to interact and communicate with others. Wagner *et al* (2008) [17] note that e-Learning makes available extra prospects for interactivity between students and teachers during content delivery.
4. E-learning takes into account the individual learners differences. It also permits each student to study at his or her own pace and speed whether slow or quick. It therefore increases satisfaction and decreases stress (Codone, 2001; Amer, 2007; Ur dan and Weggen, 2000) [3, 2, 16].

2.6 E-learning tools

Tools that can be used in e-learning can virtually include any electronic devices. They include:

1. Web-based tools.
2. Computers
3. Smart devices
4. Videos
5. Films
6. Interactive boards

To sum up this review, these tools are described in this paper as 'modern' not because they have been introduced in ELT recently. In fact, they have been employed for quite a few years. They are modern because they have the ability to renew their abilities and to adapt to the ever-changing realities of ELT. Although, these tools have served the purposes of teaching and learning in the past few decades, they can now be adapted to serve the new demands created by the unprecedented revolution in information. By virtue of being able to use in order to develop today's students competences, they are modern. Today's students need to develop the 21st Century skills, especially the four C's (Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical thinking). They also need to develop High Order Thinking skills (HOTS) as described in the new version of Bloom's Taxonomy.

3. Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature. It attempts to draw a picture of the present situation in ELT best practices in relation to two aspects:

1. The effect of using modern tools on the improvement of the language performance of the students.
2. The positive attitude of today's students towards using modern tools in English language classes.

3.1 Problem, questions and hypotheses

3.1.1 The problem under focus

Throughout her experience as a teacher of English language, the researcher observed that there has divorce between theory and practice in the field of language teaching and learning.

Theory is well in advance as far as today's realities and the potentialities of the new generations are concerned. The 21st Century has witnessed – and will certainly witness – new challenges and demands in all walks of life. The new generations who were born and brought up in the rapidly changing digital environment possess skills that are quite different from the past generations. They also have different needs and goals. Consequently, they require different teaching and learning technologies.

On the other hand, the teaching and learning technologies are lagging behind. Although teachers are well informed about the new demands and opportunities, in practice the technologies they employ fall far short of the students' expectations.

This mismatch has motivated the researcher to look at both sides of the coin: (a) the impact of modern tools on bettering the students' performance, and (b) the teachers' perception of the students' attitudes towards modern tools.

3.1.2 The study questions

This paper tries to provide answers to the following questions:

1. From the students' perspective, what is the impact of using modern tools in the English language class?
2. From the teachers' perspective, what are the attitudes of the students towards modern tools?
3. To what extent are teachers aware of the importance of modern tools?

3.1.3 The hypotheses

The study is based on the following sets of hypotheses:

Set (A):

1. H_0 : Modern technologies have no impact on the language performance of the students.
2. H_1 : Modern technologies have a significant impact on the students' language performance.

Set (B)

1. H_0 : From the teachers' perspective, the students' attitude towards modern tools is positive.
2. H_1 : From the teachers' perspective, the students' attitude towards modern tools is negative.

Set (C)

1. H_0 : Teachers are not aware of the importance of modern tools.
2. H_1 : Teachers are aware of the importance of modern tools.

3.2 The sample

The sample comprises two categories: (a) students of English, and (b) teacher of English. The number of the students is 30 students. The number of the teachers is 10 teachers.

3.3 The data collection tools

Two instruments have been developed to collect data:

1. A questionnaire for the students, and
2. A structures interview for the teachers

The two instruments covered the different dimensions of the two aspects mentioned above.

3.3.1 Reliability and validity of the data collection tools

To ensure that the instruments will collect the same data and the data that is relevant to the present study, they were designed, referred to judgment by a jury of experts and piloted prior to their application.

The following two tables show the level of reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Table 1: L Reliability of the questionnaire

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.976	10

Table (1) above shows that the reliability of the questionnaire is very high.

Table 2: Validity of the questionnaire

Validity Statistics	
Validity	N of Items
.988	10

Table (2) above shows that the validity of the questionnaire is very high.

3.4 Analysis of data

Two types of analysis were conducted:

3.4.1 For the questionnaire

The questionnaire was rigourously analyzed using quantitative data analysis. This was done by using the SPSS program in order to obtain the weighted means for the responses of the subjects.

4. Analysis and Discussion of data

4.1 The student’s questionnaire

4.1.1. Weighted mean for the significant improvement of language performance

Table 3: Likert-scale weighted mean for the significant improvement of language performance by using modern tool

		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Mean	Std. Deviation	Result
Using modern tools in the English lesson causes anxiety	Frequency	6	1	5	5	13	2.4000	1.56690	D
	Percent	20.0	3.3	16.7	16.7	43.3			
Using modern tools creates a favorable environment in the English lesson	Frequency	14	11	4	1	00	4.2667	.82768	SA
	Percent	46.7	36.7	13.3	3.3	00			
Using modern tools can facilitate learning the four language skills	Frequency	15	10	4	1	00	4.3000	.83666	SA
	Percent	50.0	33.3	13.3	3.3	00			
Using modern tools helps remembering the details of the lesson	Frequency	15	19	5	00	00	4.3333	.75810	SA
	Percent	50.0	33.3	16.7	00	00			
Using modern tools makes English language classes more interesting	Frequency	14	10	5	00	1	4.2000	.96132	SA
	Percent	46.7	33.3	16.7	00	3.3			
Total							3.9000	.92139	A

Table (3) above shows that the overall mean for the aspect of significant improvement of language performance by using modern tool = 3.9000 which is equivalent to 'Agree'. However, this overall weighted mean will only make sense if it is read in light of the weighted means of the individual items that are the constituents of this aspect.

For the first item which tries to elicit information about the feeling of the students towards using modern tools by the

3.4.2 for the interview

The interview was thoroughly analyzed using qualitative data analysis. This was done by grouping the answers of the respondents under each one of the questions. The answers were then compared and reported.

teacher, the weighted mean = 2.4000, which is equivalent to "Disagree". This indicates that the subjects feel at ease when modern tools are employed in the English language class. In other words, the students feel relaxed with modern tools and the level of anxiety is low.

The weighted mean for item two "using modern tools creates a favourable environment in the English lesson" = 4.2667, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". This consolidates the

previous result and it shows that the subjects believe that modern tools create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

The weighted mean for item three "the ability of modern tools to facilitate the learning of the four language skills" = 4.3000, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". This indicates that the students believe that modern tools make the learning of the four language skills easier.

The weighted mean for item four = 4.333, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". This item sought to find information

about the subjects' opinion concerning the ability of modern tools to help them commit the details of the lesson to their long term memory. The subjects strongly agreed to this.

The last item in this aspect relates closely to the first two items. It focuses on the ability of modern tools to foster interest in the English lessons. The weighted mean for this item = 4.2000, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". Accordingly, the subjects believe that modern tools make the English classes interesting.

4.1.2 Weighted mean for improving the students' attitudes towards using modern tools

Table 4: Likert-scale weighted mean for improving the students' attitudes towards using modern tools in English classes.

		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Mean	Std. Deviation	Result
Using modern tools creates a positive attitude towards learning English Using modern tools leads to better learning achievement	Frequency	18	8	3	1	00	4.4333	.81720	SA
	Percent	60.9	26.7	10.0	3.3	00			
	Frequency	8	7	14	1	00	3.7333	.90719	A
	Percent	26.7	23.3	46.7	3.3	00			
Using modern tools raises confidence	Frequency	15	9	5	00	1	4.2333	.97143	SA
	Percent	50.0	30.0	16.7	00	3.3			
Using modern tools helps expanding vocabulary fields	Frequency	11	11	7	1	00	4.0667	.86834	A
	Percent	36.7	36.7	23.3	3.3	00			
Using modern tools helps retention of newly introduced words	Frequency	15	9	5	1	00	4.2667	.86834	SA
	Percent	50.0	30.0	16.7	00	3.3			
Total							4.1467	.83696	A

Table (4) above shows that the overall mean for the aspect of for improving the students' attitudes towards using modern tools in English classes = 4.1467, which is equivalent to "Agree". However; in order to have a clearer picture of this aspect, a closer look at the items which constitute it is necessary.

The weighted mean of item six "modern tools create a positive attitude towards learning English" = 4.4333, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". This means that the subjects believe that have the ability to make their attitude towards learning English positive.

The weighted mean of item seven = 3.7333n which is equivalent to "Agree". This indicates that the subjects have the opinion that modern tools leads to better achievement and they consequently score high marks in tests and exams.

The weighted mean of item eight "modern tools raises confidence" = 4.2333, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". Accordingly, the subjects strongly agree that modern tools have the ability to build up confidence in them and they will not experience any sort of inhibition in the language class. The weighted mean of item nine = 4.0667, which is equivalent to "Agree". This means that the subjects agree that modern tools help them to build up their stock of vocabulary in accordance with the different registers.

The weighted mean of item ten = 4.2667, which is equivalent to "Strongly Agree". This means that the subjects believe that modern tools help the retention and retrieval of newly learnt words

4.2 The teachers' interview

4.2.1 Attitude of teachers towards the traditional tools

Two of the respondents stated that they feel relaxed and comfortable with traditional tools. They think that traditional

ways are safe to use and they are not always defective. However, eight of the respondents feel that traditional tools not effective enough in teaching English. They provide a number of reasons for this:

- Time has changed and therefore there is a need for different strategies and ways to teach.
- Traditional tools are tiring, exhausting, boring and they do not provide enough room for creativity and innovation in teaching English language.
- Traditional tools are teacher centered and students might not be involved. Students' interaction and involvement inside the classroom is less enthusiastic.
- Traditional tools have little effect on students understanding the language. Because kids need to be more stimulated so multimedia and other resources have to be brought in for students to understand.
- Traditional tools are too structured and they impede students' potentials.
- Traditional tools decreases motivation and the students need tools that make English language learning more interesting.

4.2.2 Teachers' application of modern tools

All of the respondents asserted that they use modern tools in their classes. They also provided some reasons for doing this:

- Modern tools play an important role in teaching English.
- Modern tools are interesting and attracting.
- Modern tools have the potentiality of matching different modes and skills and as such will help the students to improve their language skills.

4.2.3 Teachers' use of the suitable modern tool

All of the respondents stated that they choose the type of

modern tool that is appropriate to the lesson they teach. They pointed out that different skills need different tools. At the same time, this will lead to the encouragement of the students and has the effect of raising their motivation.

4.2.4 Perception of the teachers' feeling of the students towards modern tools

As far as the feeling of the students towards using modern tools is concerned, all of the respondents agreed that the students feel excited, highly motivated, involved, inspired and active. They explain that this is reflected in the degree of interest the students show as well as their participation in the activities. They claim that the use of modern tools result in the enthusiastic readiness of the students to take in the learning materials because of the amusement they experience which is the result of the dynamic, interactive nature of modern tools. This is evident to the respondents in the degree of confidence the students reveal.

4.2.5 The role of modern tools in simplifying learning of English

All of the respondents agreed that modern tools have the potentiality of making the learning experience simpler. They stated that modern tools facilitate the process of following the learning materials. The respondents attributed this to the fact that modern tools make the attention of the students more focused and help them to follow the details of the lessons. The respondents asserted that modern tools have great positive effects on the learning experience. They believe that modern tools represent a significant channel in this regard since they make learning extremely easy and loaded with fun. They also stressed that modern tools can match the different language skills and in this way maximize the learning outcomes in terms of expanding the students' range of language knowledge.

4.2.6 The role of modern tools in improving students' performance and enhancing their understanding

All of the respondents emphasized the fact that modern tools can improve students' performance and enhance their understanding. They stated that modern tools make use of all of the senses and in this way they become more interested and involved in the lesson. This, they argue, will help the students to understand easily and use language creatively in real life communication. The reason for this is that through modern tools, the students are able to grasp the knowledge of the lesson easier and they respond better as the lesson is not boring. They learn concepts easier and are able to use language in practical ways. Vocabulary increases as memory and use of the word is enhanced.

4.2.7 Teachers' opinion of the effectiveness of modern tools in relation to time consumption

All of the respondents strongly stressed that using modern tools never wastes time; on the contrary, they believe that they save a lot of time and effort because they facilitate and accelerate learning by making the process more interesting. Moreover, they claim, modern tools have the advantage of making the teaching and learning process much more effective in terms of students understanding of the lesson and

remembering it when needed. In addition, they believe that modern tools provide different opportunities to make learning more fun and enjoyable in term of teaching, that help students to master the subject; in accordance with their preferred learning styles.

5. Conclusions

The results obtained from the analysis and discussion of data above will be used here to verify the hypotheses and to provide answers for the questions of the study.

5.1 The first question and the first set of hypotheses

From the students' perspective, what is the impact of using modern tools in the English language class?

- H_0 : Modern technologies have no impact on the language performance of the students.
- H_1 : Modern technologies have a significant impact on the students language performance

Table (3) in section 4.1.1. Shows that the overall mean for the aspect of significant improvement of language performance by using modern tool = 3.9000 which is equivalent to 'Agree'.

It also shows that:

1. The students disagree with the idea that they do not feel st ease with modern tools. The weighted mean is 2.4000.
2. The students strongly agree that modern tools create an environment that is favorable to learning English. The weighted mean is 4.2667.
3. The students strongly agree that modern tools facilitate the learning of the four language skills. The weighted mean is 4.3000.
4. The students strongly agree that modern tools help them to commit the details of the lesson to their long term memory. The weighted mean is 4.333.
5. The students strongly agree that modern tools make English lessons interesting. The weighted mean is 4.2000.

This is further supported by the result in section 4.2.5 of the teachers' interview. The teachers stressed that:

1. Modern tools make the leaning experience simpler and loaded with fun.
2. Modern tools make the attention of the students more focused and help them to grasp the details of the lesson.
3. Modern tools maximize the learning outcomes since they have the ability to match the different language skills.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. And the answer to question (1) is that modern tools have a significant positive impact in the English language class.

5.2 The second question and the second set of hypotheses

From the teachers' perspective, what are the attitudes of the students towards modern tools?

- H_0 : From the teachers' perspective, the students' attitude towards modern tools is negative.
- H_1 : From the teachers' perspective, the students' attitude towards modern tools is positive.

Table (4) in section 4.1.2 shows that the overall mean for the aspect of for improving the students' attitudes towards using

modern tools in English classes = 4.1467, which is equivalent to "Agree".

It also shows that:

1. The students strongly agree that modern tools create a positive attitude towards learning English. The weighted mean is 4.4333.
2. The students agree that modern tools leads to better achievement and they consequently score high marks in tests and exams. The weighted mean is 3.7333.
3. The students strongly agree that modern tools have the ability to build up confidence in them and they will not experience any sort of inhibition in the language class. The weighted mean is 4.2333.
4. The students agree that modern tools help them to build up their stock of vocabulary in accordance with the different registers. The weighted mean is 4.0667.
5. The students strongly agree that modern tools help the retention and retrieval of newly learnt words. The weighted mean is 4.2667.

Moreover, the results obtained from the teachers interview reinforces this finding.

In section 4.2.4, the teachers agreed that:

1. With modern tools, the students feel excited, highly motivated, involved, inspired and active.
2. The dynamic, interactive nature of modern tools result in the enthusiastic readiness of the students to take in the learning materials because of the amusement they experience.

In section 4.2.6, the teachers emphasized the following points:

1. Modern tools can improve students' performance and enhance their understanding.
2. Modern tools make use of all of the senses and in this way they become more interested and involved in the lesson.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. And the answer to question (2) is that the teachers perceive that the attitudes of the students towards modern tools is positive.

5.3 The third question and the third set of hypotheses

To what extent are teachers aware of the importance of modern tools?

- H_0 : Teachers are not aware of the importance of modern tools.
- H_1 : Teachers are aware of the importance of modern tools.

As is evident from section 4.2.1 of the teachers' interview, the vast majority of the teachers have negative views concerning traditional tools. In contrast, section 4.2.2 reveals that the teachers have very positive attitudes towards modern tools. In addition, section 4.2.3 show that the teachers are aware of the potentialities of modern tools as they use them selectively in order to match the different language skills. In section 4.2.7, the teachers strongly stressed that using modern tools save a lot of time and effort because they facilitate and accelerate learning by making the process more interesting. They also

pointed out that modern tools have the advantage of making the teaching and learning process much more effective in terms of students understanding of the lesson and remembering it when needed. The teachers Laos believe that modern tools provide different opportunities to make learning more fun and enjoyable in term of teaching as well as matching the preferred learning styles of the students.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. Consequently, the answer to question (3) is that the teachers are aware of the importance of modern tools in teaching and learning English language.

6. Recommendations and suggestions for further research

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the results above, the following recommendations are made:

1. Explicit efforts have to be exerted by educationalists and textbook writers to harness the positive attitudes of the students towards modern tools. The students need to be empowered by having these positive attitudes capitalized on. There should be overt efforts to explicitly incorporate opportunities for the students to transform these attitudes into behavior. Students need to be trained on how to reflect on their own feelings and experiences in order to make the best out of them.
2. Teachers need to be trained on how to transform their theories into actions of best practice. They need to be trained on how to use modern tools in order to meet the needs and objectives of their students.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

The researcher feels that the following areas need to be investigated:

1. The role of modern tools in narrowing the gap between the teachers' practice and the students' expectations.
2. The role of modern tools in developing the 21st Century skills in the students.

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