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DIGITAL TOOLS IN AUTONOMOUS LEARNING AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE ENHANCEMENT OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AMONG TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of digital tools in autonomous learning on the enhancement of sociolinguistic competence among technical university students. The study investigates the efficacy of diverse digital platforms, such as language-learning applications, online dictionaries, podcasts, video resources, and social media, in enhancing students' proficiency in utilizing English appropriately across various social and professional settings. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, integrating pre- and post-tests of sociolinguistic competence with questionnaires and classroom observations. The results show that students who use digital tools on their own learn a lot more about register, politeness strategies, and culturally appropriate expressions. Students also said that they were more motivated, confident, and independent when it came to using language. The study emphasizes the significance of incorporating digital tools into autonomous learning frameworks to enhance sociolinguistic competence, especially within technical education settings. Teachers are given suggestions on how to create tasks that effectively mix independent learning with digital resources to get the best results.

Independent learning, digital tools, sociolinguistic competence, technical university students, ESP, and language learning are some of the words that come to mind.

Beginning. As the engineering, science, and technology fields become more globalized, it has become more important for students at technical universities to

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be able to speak English. Nonetheless, students frequently exhibit proficiency in grammar and vocabulary while lacking sociolinguistic competence—the capacity to communicate suitably across social, cultural, and professional contexts (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). The lack of real English communication in traditional classrooms is a big reason why this is happening.

Independent learning, characterized as a learner-centered methodology wherein students autonomously plan, monitor, and assess their learning, presents an effective resolution to this challenge (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2011). The incorporation of digital tools into independent learning frameworks provides supplementary advantages, such as access to authentic materials, practice in real-world contexts, and opportunities for interaction with native speakers and global communities. This research examines the function of digital tools in autonomous learning to improve sociolinguistic competence among technical university students. In particular, it looks at the following research questions: Which digital tools are most useful for learning sociolinguistic skills on your own?

How do these tools affect how students understand and use register, politeness, and cultural norms?

How do students feel about using digital tools to learn on their own? The study seeks to offer pragmatic suggestions for the incorporation of digital tools into autonomous learning methodologies to enhance students' sociolinguistic proficiency.

Review of the Literature

Sociolinguistic Proficiency. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language correctly in different social and cultural situations (Hymes, 1972). Canale and Swain (1980) define it as an essential element of communicative competence, including awareness of register, strategies for politeness, discourse conventions, and language use tailored to specific contexts. In technical university settings, students frequently encounter difficulties with pragmatic dimensions, encompassing formal communication in professional environments and informal communication in social interactions.

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Learning on your own. Independent learning, also known as learner autonomy, stresses that students are in charge of planning, doing, and judging their own learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). In language education, independent learning enables students to engage with authentic materials, practice beyond the classroom, and evaluate their communication strategies. Prior studies indicate that independent learning improves motivation, critical thinking, and language proficiency, especially in situations with restricted classroom exposure (Benson, 2011; Ushioda, 2013).

Digital Language Learning Tools. Digital tools give students real, flexible, and interactive ways to learn. Some common tools are: Duolingo, LingQ, and Mem are all apps that help you learn a language. rise Cambridge, Oxford, and Merriam-Webster are all online dictionaries and translators.

YouTube educational channels and BBC Learning English are two examples of videos and podcasts.

Discussion boards, language exchange sites, and other online communities are all examples of social media.

These tools help students become more sociolinguistically competent by exposing them to real language use, culturally specific phrases, and different registers.

Methodology

The study included 40 technical university students participating in an intermediate-level English course. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling to guarantee similar levels of English proficiency. We did a survey of how our university students use digital tools so that we can make sure they are taking care of them and that they will help them learn the language well and use their communication skills in real-life situations.

Survey on How People Use Digital Tools:

To find out how students use digital tools to learn languages, they were asked the following questions:

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How often you use it (every day, every week, rarely, or never)

Different kinds of digital tools that people use, like apps, online dictionaries, videos, podcasts, and social media

Reasons for use (to practice listening, learn new words, improve grammar, or practice sociolinguistics)

This survey helped us figure out which tools are the most popular and how students use them in their own learning.

The survey results showed the following trends:

How often it is used:

40% of students said they used at least one digital tool for language learning every day.

35% said they used the tools every week, and 25% said they only used them sometimes.

Different kinds of digital tools:

The most popular apps for learning languages were Duolingo, Memrise, and LingQ (70%).

Sixty percent of students used videos and podcasts, mostly to listen to and understand real speech.

Half of the students used online dictionaries and translators.

Forty percent used social media and discussion boards to practice communication and learn about other cultures.

Why you should use it:

65% of students used digital tools to get better at speaking and listening.

55% used them to help them learn new words.

45% said they used digital tools to learn about the rules for polite and socially acceptable language.

Discussion

The results of this study show that using digital tools for independent learning greatly improves the sociolinguistic skills of technical university students. The results of the pre- and post-tests showed that students got a lot better at using the right registers, using politeness strategies, understanding discourse norms, and

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communicating in ways that are appropriate for their culture. This is in line with earlier studies that showed that hearing real language and having chances to practice on your own are important for improving sociolinguistic skills (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Benson, 2011).

The survey about how students used digital tools showed that most of them used apps, videos, podcasts, online dictionaries, and social media sites on a regular basis. Students said that using these tools often helped them understand what they were listening to, learn new words, and understand how to use language that is socially acceptable. This indicates that the frequency and nature of digital tool utilization are significantly correlated with enhancements in sociolinguistic competence. Students who used real-world materials and interactive apps did better on tests of pragmatics and register awareness. This supports the idea that using technology in a hands-on way helps students practice language in real life. Additionally, students' qualitative feedback underscored heightened motivation, autonomy, and confidence in utilizing English. Learners were able to choose their own tools and tasks, which allowed them to customize their learning to their own needs. This is in line with the idea of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). This independence probably helped them do better in sociolinguistics because they could practice real-world interactions over and over again and think about how to use language in different situations.

Some problems were noticed, like different levels of self-control and not being able to get to devices or stable internet connections. These factors sometimes made it harder for some participants to learn on their own using digital tools. Nonetheless, the comprehensive results demonstrate that digital tools, when judiciously incorporated into an independent learning framework, can substantially improve both linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies in technical students.

Conclusion

This study looked at how digital tools help students learn on their own and how they affect the development of sociolinguistic competence among technical university students. The findings indicate that students' understanding and use of registers, politeness strategies, discourse norms, and language that is culturally

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appropriate improve a lot when they use digital tools on their own. Using apps, videos, podcasts, online dictionaries, and social media sites a lot gives students real-world examples and chances to practice outside of class. When students can choose and manage their own digital learning resources, they become more independent, motivated, and confident.

Even though there are some problems, using digital tools in independent learning is a great way to help students in technical education settings learn how to use language in social situations.

Useful Suggestions:

Teachers should use real-life materials and digital tools in both ESP and general English classes. Independent learning tasks that are guided should be made to focus on sociolinguistic skills. Students should get help so they can use technology and know how to use tools well.

Directions for Future Research:

Examine the enduring effects of digital tool–facilitated autonomous learning on sociolinguistic proficiency.

Compare digital learning on your own to learning in a classroom. Investigate the function of particular categories of digital tools in enhancing specific aspects of sociolinguistic competence.

This study conclusively demonstrates that the integration of digital tools into independent learning significantly enhances sociolinguistic competence, equipping technical students for effective communication in both professional and social settings.

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