

Role of ICT Tools in Learning Behaviour of EFL Students

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Abstract

This article explores the various Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools employed by public schools. The study aims at identifying the ways of using ICT tools and platforms and their role in learning behaviour of secondary level EFL students. ICT, though beneficial for most of the cases, may cause serious problems to the learners if improperly adopted. The study is based on qualitative research design and includes the focus group discussion and classroom observation. The data obtained were transcribed and analysed based on the participant's perception, experiences and classroom observation. Findings indicate both positive and negative aspects of technology induced behavioural changes in the learners. The study suggests that continuous monitoring by the school management and parents, regulatory intervention on the irrelevant Internet contents and awareness programs to the students need to be immediately and effectively administered to stop the learner's behaviour being negatively affected by ICT.

Keywords: *Continuous monitoring, ICT tools, Learning behaviour*

Introduction

ICT is something that is a part of students' life since young children are surrounded by technology at home, in their community, and increasingly, in early childhood education programs. Use of ICT has become an integral part of human life. Its role has been extended to the various dimensions of modern civilization. It has been increasingly adopted as a means of teaching-learning process after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic throughout the globe. Physical presence of teachers and students in the classroom and connectivity were banned leaving behind the only option of online classes employing the ICT tools and platforms.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the term that is currently used worldwide to describe new technologies which depend mainly on computers these days. Even the traditional technologies such as radio, television and telephone are considered as ICTs. ICT is defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store and manage information. Taylor (2001) considered ICTs as instrumental in social transformations from the age of industrialization

to the present digital era.

A broad definition of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) includes both traditional equipment, such as radio, television, cellular phones, satellite system, print and video materials, and newer technologies, such as computers and networks, hardware and software, virtual reality, distance education applications, mind-computer and interface technologies. However, it may have a narrower definition when applied to some particular area. Noytim (2006) stated that ICT refers primarily to computers and computer-related products, stationary and portative computers with implied accessories and various computer programs i.e. software. In addition, it refers to Internet and Intranet, television, DVD and VCR players and smart or interactive boards. Noytim (2006) investigated the potential of the Internet to support students' English language development, in particular the capacity of the Internet to support students' English reading development. Arnesen (2010) drew the conclusion that unfortunately, the massive political and economic investments in ICT in education have so far not paid off. Yunus (2013) suggested that teachers' workload in schools should be reduced so as to give them more time to prepare for their lessons. Teaching itself is still the core business of teachers. A lot of time is needed to plan and construct lessons using ICT, especially for teachers who are not competent in using ICT. Hence, other administrative workloads should be reduced to further increase the teachers' use of ICT in their teaching.

Clark (2013) carried out the study on 'The Use of Technology to Support Vocabulary Development of English Language Learners'. Three themes were found when conducting research: explicit instruction compared to the iPad, the use of visual and audio components to increase vocabulary knowledge, and differences in engagement and behaviour. These findings call for teachers to create learning environments that focus on oral language skills to develop vocabulary and incorporate technological tools. Kreutz and Rhodin (2016) concluded that the majority of students are affected by ICT in a positive way. Also, the collected data showed that students' motivation increased because the lessons got more fun and they felt happier when incorporating ICT in the EFL classroom. These findings of the study by Aaron (2016) showed that additional guidelines and assessment tasks must be implemented to more accurately determine actual fluency gains that EFL learners can make in a dedicated online English language class over the course of 14 weeks of instruction. Technology can play a major role in the way an English course is taught and in the way a student learns. It can foster interaction and motivation in students in ways that a class taught without technology simply could not (Boles, 2011). Yuksel & Tanriverdi (2009) explored the effects of watching captioned movie clip on vocabulary development of EFL learners. When the findings of this study are interpreted, it can be argued that viewing the movie clip has helped the participants of the study develop their vocabulary knowledge, and this would facilitate the reading process.

Besides having the advantages, there are some disadvantages regarding the use of ICT in the teaching of reading and writing. Two concerns that teachers have about using technology such as Instant Messaging (IM) or blogs with their students is that students will

not take the work seriously and will not use what they have learned in school in their postings (Sweeny, 2010). Moreover, as Ward (2004) pointed out, although students could be exposed to a variety of reading materials and genres of writing, there is a danger that the reading skills that are developed from scrolling the computer screen lead to an accelerated but superficial, and often inaccurate, understanding of the content.

Altun (2021) claimed that using technology in learning English language is very essential, having such technological tools in the classroom allows the teacher to use different methods and approaches in teaching his/her students. The findings of the study by Hafa and Moubtassime (2021) indicated that access to ICT tools is still limited among the respondents of the study. Access to internet connection within the respondents' universities was also found to be inadequate. The study revealed that the respondents' use of ICT for educational purposes is limited. However, the students' perceptions towards the benefits of ICT use in learning English were found to be highly positive.

Analysis of the data obtained from the study of Mohammad et al. (2019) revealed that ICT has a tremendous impact on student learning in secondary schools. The study suggests that ICT has shifted teachers' and students' perspectives on visualising real world application of course concepts, documenting memories and recording of information. The researcher came to the conclusion that ICT resources' availability, accessibility, and usability had a substantial impact on students' learning in senior secondary schools in Sokoto south. As a result of the foregoing, the researcher believes that secondary schools should invest more in computers and related technology. ICT tools should not be restricted to labs and libraries, but should be made more widely available through the construction of ICT resource centres. ICT training should not be restricted to Microsoft Office; rather, it should aim to provide students with the contextual skills necessary to apply ICT in their learning. The research also suggested that the government contribute cash. An exploratory study was carried out by Ubaedillah et al. (2021) to determine how English teachers used social media to teach English. Five themes were identified as a result of the interview session of the teacher's perceptions of social media used on distance Learning. They are: Kinds of social media, activities, motivation, improving students English language skills and effectiveness. Technology gives learners more opportunities to cooperate with their peers leading to learning from each other (Costley, 2014). According to Gilakjani (2017), people's habits of gathering information, conducting research, and communicating with others have all altered substantially as a result of technological advancements. Distance barriers have been reduced by technology, allowing higher education to effectively teach anyone. In order to improve teaching and learning, technology integration is becoming more common in classrooms. The study of Adhikari (2021) aimed to find out the secondary students' and teachers' perspectives on the integration of technology in English language teaching (ELT). The finding of the study showed that technology-integrated education improves teacher and student performance, enhances student-centred teaching methodologies, expands learning opportunities, and results in pedagogical reforms. Technology also helps teachers and students to be more productive when teaching

languages. Language teaching and learning that incorporates technology improves coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between teachers and students. Rahimi and Yadollahi (2010) carried out the study to determine Iranian EFL teachers' level of computer anxiety and its relationship with ICT integration into English classes and teachers' personal characteristics. The results indicated a positive relationship between computer anxiety and age; however, computer anxiety, gender, and experience of teaching were not found to be related.

Zhao (2005) analysed technology on four dimensions: technology that enhances language input/exposure, technology that improves exercise and feedback, technology that facilitates authentic communication, and technology that sustains motivation. Mobi et al. (2015) examined the negative impact of ICT on secondary school students in Nigeria. The findings revealed that ICT can take students' valuable learning time, can be over used, can turn educational experiences into games for students, hence improving low academic performance, and can expose students to porn sites and divert them during class hours. Alhumaid (2019) investigated the ways through which classroom technology such as iPad, Internet connection, laptops and social media, impact negatively on education. The study states that technology could change education negatively through four paths: deteriorating students' competences of reading and writing, dehumanising educational environments, distorting social interactions between teachers and students and isolating individuals when using technology. Yunus et al. (2013) revealed that attracting students' attention, facilitating students' learning process, helping to improve students' vocabulary knowledge and promoting meaningful learning were regarded as the most important advantages of using ICT in teaching ESL reading and writing. Disadvantages include the difficulty in classroom control and students' distraction as well as their tendency to use short forms in writing tasks. Fu (2013) reviewed on the merits of ICT integration in schools, barriers or challenges encountered in the use of ICT, factors influencing successful ICT integration, in-service and pre-service teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and confidence in using ICT as well as the importance of school culture in the use of ICT. Ahmadi (2018) focused on the role of using new technologies in learning English as a second/foreign language. It discusses different attitudes which support English language learners to increase their learning skills through using technologies. Joshi (2016) found that most of the students of secondary level are weakly using technology and public-school students were poorer in several measured items even boys and girl students were not different in the use of ICT.

The number of literatures reviewed above justified that ICT has become the integral part of teaching learning activities. ICT tools include cell phones, computers, projector, tablet, smart board basically connected with the Internet. They all are useful while teaching and learning. They helped us by providing access to more and better education contents, administrative tasks, models for simulations and other activities. They also enable students to learn from a distance. Therefore, use of ICT tools in the classroom is increasing. We have tried to bring them in use during covid-19 pandemic too. But we have found that most of the

government schools are still unable to use them practically in the classes. Although the use of ICT in classes is increasing day by day, the study regarding the role of ICT assisted classes in the learning behaviour of students is yet to perform.

Purpose of the study

This study aims at finding answers to the following research questions.

1. What is the current status of using ICT tools in grade twelve English teaching at government schools?
2. How has learning behaviour been affected by the use of ICT tools?

Methodology

The research design of this study is an interpretive approach under the qualitative research method. The participants for this study were purposively selected from the grade twelve students of two secondary government schools. One school was selected from Kathmandu Valley and another from outside Kathmandu. By keeping in touch with the participants, a rapport was created. Focus group discussion (FGD) with a group of six students of grade twelve in each school was carried out. The discussion questions were all open ended. Both schools and students were purposively selected based on the use of ICT in teaching process and the regularity of student's in the class. It took about one hour and ten minutes for FGD. It was conducted after the regular school hours within the school premises. Place for FGD was selected based on the comfort of the students. It was ascertained that the participant's grade ten and eleven classes were conducted via online platforms. Classroom observation was also done as part of the in-depth study. Both video and audio recordings were performed as part of data collection. Participant students and their groups were named as S1, S2... and G1, G2. Participants were informed that their identities would not be revealed at any cost to preserve their confidentiality. Obtained data were transcribed and findings of the study were clustered under different thematic issues, both positive and negative roles. Then, the data was analysed using an inductive approach.

The ontology of this study is based on subjective and multiple realities since knowledge construction is a social phenomenon. The nature of the reality of classroom teaching practices of English at the secondary level is constructive reality. So these practices may be guided by student's beliefs, attitudes and background realities. The study is value laden because each participant's perspectives and responses were valued. Their experiences of classroom learning practices in English were varied and accordingly, there might be differences in understanding and experiences as classroom teaching practices itself has multifaceted and contextual dynamics.

Result

Common ICT tools used in both the schools were computer, Internet, multimedia projector, smart boards and various web and mobile based applications. Each clustered theme incorporated a similar set of views and responses of the participants. They are discussed below.

Positive Roles of ICT in Classroom Behaviour

Based on the classroom observation, perception, experience and thought of the respondents, major positive roles that ICT play on learning behaviour of secondary level learners are discussed in this section.

Knowledge Construction

Most of the participants agreed that deriving or producing new knowledge on the basis of the knowledge base obtained from the Internet is possible due to ICT. Participants from both the schools stated that they could acquire knowledge from the different universities, libraries and institutions via their web sites and/or mobile applications. Students could access those resources with the help of ICT tools including their computers and mobile phones. Students could learn different aspects of the English language by sitting at a single location and could construct knowledge on their own through collaborative process. S1 from G1 expressed that:

Sometimes our teacher arranges multimedia projector and speaker in the class. We watch videos of native people. We listen to how they speak, pronounce words and discuss them in class. It entertains us a lot. Side by side our knowledge on the proper use of English, their culture and society also increases.

His classmates added to his statement that they used to interact and discuss with each other sharing their viewpoint after such classes. They could analyse and interpret the various aspects of the English language.

Collaborative Learning

Three participants from G1 and four from G2 had their strong positive views regarding the role of ICT tools in collaborative learning whereas, three from G1 and two from G2 remained only mildly positive. All the students however agreed on the use of ICT tools for accomplishing their group project tasks, submitting assignments and studying the subject matter. Researchers also observed discussion and collaboration while the students were engaged in preparing their project presentation. Working together with computers and the Internet helped to change the learning behaviour of the participants. S3 from G2 stated that:

Our English teacher gives us one project work for each week dividing us into different groups. Physically we are not able to meet after school hours. So we created a messenger group and met there virtually. We discuss and prepare projects and present in groups during school hours.

Real Life Skills Building

Learning does not mean understanding just the course matter of formal education. Besides that, a number of skills are required in human life. Some of them include speech delivery, cooking, driving, fine arts, knitting, software coding, socialising etc. These skills help us to cope with the different situations in real life. It was found that participants enjoyed learning real life skills by using ICT tools when they were free during lock down. Third student (S3) from second group (G2) responded:

I learned knitting through a YouTube channel when I got free time during the lockdown period. During the span of six months I became successful at knitting a pair of woollen hand gloves.

Few respondents from each group highlighted that they learnt how to deliver presentations with the help of videos they watched in their English classes.

High Quality Input and Feedback

Students can obtain authentic, valid, accurate and relevant information from the web sites of the respective organisations or institutions. They can also select what to accept or reject from the pool of resources. All of the respondents considered ICT tools and online platforms as the major medium of providing feedback to their teachers about the classes. One of the students stated that he used to hesitate to interact with the teachers during physical classes but after covid pandemic he used to send feedback to the teachers about the understanding of the subject matter. He thought that his teacher's way of teaching had changed gradually after that feedback. Some of them added that they also had got an opportunity to provide feedback with the help of google forms, messenger groups, viber groups and even through the apps developed by their schools, for example 'My School Nepal'. The thought of S3 from G1 is presented below:

I couldn't ask my teacher about confused questions directly but now using the Internet I am sending emails to my teacher asking questions and feedback. My teacher replies to me when she gets free. In this way, these days the teacher pays much attention towards me.

Increment in Students' Attention

ICT tools and technology assisted classrooms increased the attention of students towards the subject matter and the teacher. Three respondents each from the two groups said that they were eager to learn something new and important. ICT tools helped them to learn new things. One from G2 replied:

Madam, you know we used to wait until third period, i.e. English class on each Friday. We could go to an English lab and learn by sitting in front of the smart board.

Almost all the students claimed that their English class that day would be pin drop silence and they would pay full attention to the class.

Instructional Tool in Teaching

Use of multimedia projectors, powerpoint slides, tutorial videos, audios for listening practices and tests, animated learning materials, movies, smart interactive boards and Internet all are the ingredients of ICT. According to the participants' perception, these tools and platforms were being regarded as the important tools for the teachers to conduct their classes effectively and purposefully. Majority of them agreed that their teachers conducted their online classes and did not make them feel it was different from the physical classes. They let them interact with the teachers if they wanted to. S2 from G2 shared her feeling as:

Our teacher speaks as well as writes in the chat box. That makes us clear. Not only that, she has joined Google classroom, messenger groups. Via them we can share our thoughts, ideas and difficulties. Teacher's instruction is also very clear rather than in a traditional class. We can see the instructions in written form as well.

Negative Roles of ICT in Classroom Behaviour

Based on the data obtained after classroom observation and focused group discussion with the participants, major negative roles that ICT plays on learning behaviour of secondary level learners are discussed in this section.

Deteriorating Competence in Reading and Writing

The research participants revealed that these days they do not have their verbal reading habit. Gradually they felt that their reading competence is decreasing day by day. Also they stated that they prefer submitting computer typed and printed assignments to their teachers instead of hand written ones. This led them to the degradation in their writing speed as well as neatness. Also the habit of searching in the Internet, copying and pasting to their assignment was the common problem of the participants of both the groups. One of the

participants outside the valley said that technology used in the classroom made him lazy to some extent because his habit of reading aloud was in the decreasing order. He further shared:

In the past, I used to read a course book a lot. These days we do not have to work much harder because we can get everything in Google and YouTube. We copy them and submit them.

Isolated Learning and loss of creativity

Although collaborative learning among distant learners and teachers/facilitators is easier with ICT, learning beyond those specified hours is changing these days. Students stay alone with their gadgets, delve into the subject matter. This changed the learning behaviour of mutual interaction, sharing things, questioning in front of the seniors, parents, teachers or their friends. Learners started to stick with the devices which led them to the dehumanisation of the teaching learning process. This was regarded as the challenge to the socialisation process by three and four learners from G1 and G2. Also dependency on the ICT is increasing in such a way that even the misinformation is considered as the valid one when obtained from the Internet. Respondents agreed that their abilities of creative thinking, composing self-text and paragraphs had been significantly reduced these days. One of the participants shared:

Once I searched from Google and prepared my assignment. Later my teacher told me that the data I used from the Internet was the old one; you should only take the data from valid and authentic sources, even if it is from Google.

Misuse and Malpractices

During classroom observation, the researcher found that the Internet was misused by the students for other purpose than assigned by their teachers. In the English lab, instead of watching the video for learning listening and speaking skills, a number of students were using their mobile phones for using messenger and other applications. It was impossible for the teacher to notice each activity of the learner. Few students were playing games by disabling their speakers. Also the same issue was discussed during FGD. Students laughed at this question. One of the participants from G1 was so excited to share that they used to cheat in their internal examination via the Internet and mobile phone. Being a little bit shy, another one from G2 shared that his friends used to watch unnecessary items by sitting in the last bench.

During Covid-19 outbreak, our teacher had taken an internal examination via zoom class. Teacher displayed a question on the screen and requested us to turn on the video but we did not turn it on. We played games and copied answers from the Internet and submitted them within a given time.

Distraction in Class Hours

Classroom observation of G2 surprised the researcher. Students were well prepared for their class. However, due to the lack of proper skills on the teacher they could not use the multimedia projector in time. They were about fifteen minutes late to start their presentation. Participants in FGD also demanded proper training to their teachers about good handling of technological tools in the classroom. Another issue as shared by the participant of the FGD, G2:

Power cuts are the major issue. Maam, in one class of 45 minutes the power goes on three to four times. How can we use ICT properly? Planning and preparation is lacking here.

Anxiety, Eye Irritation and other Health Issues

Students said that the level of their anger increased and the intimacy with their friends was affected due to the over use of virtual classes during the pandemic. Eye irritation and dryness was found to be severe in one of the participants. He used to put eye drops every two hours otherwise he could not tolerate pain. All others agreed that their eye irritation started after their online classes. It was known from the FGD, G2 that one of the students from their class had to visit the hospital after continuous headache, anxiety and abnormal behavioural changes. S6 from G2 shared as:

Ma'am, only two of our friends used to wear eye glasses earlier but now there are altogether 12 students out of 37 in our class. The number is increasing day by day. I am also feeling sleepless these days.

Discussion

Use of ICT has made our life easier. It has been extensively used in teaching learning activities these days. During the pandemic it was only the means of conducting classes though virtually. Most of the reviewed study by Li et al. (2022) reported that mobile devices successfully helped in language learning. The study concluded that mobile phones and smartphones were the most used devices and social sites such as WeChat were the most used tools. The number of positive role always outperforms that of negative when we discuss ICT. Construction of knowledge with the help of access to the abundant knowledge resources, audio visual materials that help in learning real life skills are the major ones. One of the important dimensions of measuring the effectiveness of the learning process is to take feedback.

Use of ICT helps to provide feedback to the teachers virtually, easily and without any hesitation or delay. Teachers can modify their pedagogical methodology for enhancing

quality education. Also the learners can obtain high quality input for them. Learning materials can be selected based on their area of interest from the place of their stay just by clicking on their computers. Students' attention towards interactive boards, multimedia projectors and learning videos increases than the conventional classes without any added facilities. Monotonous and boring classes become replaced by the interactive and active class hours. ICT as a powerful instructional tool help to change the learning behaviour of the learners in a positive way.

In spite of the significant positive role, using ICT needs proper training for the teachers as well as counselling and awareness of the students. The study Kim et al. (2022) found that some social networks played a positive role in supporting ICT-based instruction and professional development, whereas some imposed constraints on using ICT for teaching and learning. Misuse of ICT may lead to addiction and other malpractices. It will drastically hamper the learning attributes of the young learners. So, regular observation from the teachers and the parents about the use of ICT tools by the students is required for continuous monitoring. The learning process becomes incomplete if the learners fully depend on ICT. It should be regarded as the assistive aid, not the primary means of learning. Otherwise, creative thinking and analytical reasoning ability will be critically minimised. Virtual learning should be within the control of the learners so that socialisation does not become a big issue. Abstaining from the use of ICT in a certain interval of time helps to reduce the difficulties such as anxiety and eye irritation. Involvement of yoga and meditation also helps to mitigate the health issues caused by the use of ICT tools for long duration.

Conclusion

ICT tools and platforms play a vital role in the learning behaviour of secondary level EFL students. Students of this level are anxious about a variety of skills which they can learn with the use of ICT tools. But for the proper utilisation of ICT in learning things, the learners must have access to those resources in their schools and homes. ICT always does not impact learning behaviour positively. The findings of this study suggest teachers, school administrators and parents continuously monitor the activities of their students and children about how they handle ICT tools and for what purposes. Otherwise the learners may abuse the technology as well as their health and well-being may get badly affected.

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