Graduates’ Perception of Learning Communication Skills through Technology

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology is an essential tool for communication in today’s world. The use of technology in classrooms is becoming more popular especially as the world witnesses a revolution in the field of technology. Educators can take the opportunity to promote active teaching and learning using technology, as the popularity continues to grow and becomes inseparable from the students. This paper presents the findings of 75 first year undergraduates of Institut Teknologi Brunei’s perceptions of learning Communication Skills through internet. This is a quantitative study. Questionnaires were designed and distributed to the undergraduates. Results from the study indicate that students have positive attitudes toward the use of internet as a learning tool. They owned and used gadgets to explore the internet, had adequate basic knowledge of internet, and viewed the learning environment as supportive of using technology for learning.

Keywords: Technology, Integration, Communication Skills

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As the world enters the digital era, the use of technologies such as the computer and Internet in teaching and learning especially in the field of language learning has become very important. This is because computers are considered as a tool that open up opportunities for learning and enable us to access ideas and information from diverse sources, to extend ideas and information through processing, manipulating and analyzing material in different multimedia forms [2].

Raimes [12], claims that language teaching that facilitates communication emphasizes real language use, promotes a student centered classroom, encourages real language acquisition instead of just learning a set of grammatical rules, develops humanistic, interpersonal approaches and takes into account the nature of the learner, the learning process and learning environment. Communication Skills does not fall far apart from this category. The use of language to get the message across effectively is the objective. Teaching and learning can be more interesting and fun with the use of technology. Therefore, with the increase in the popularity of using technology among young generations nowadays, educators can take the opportunity to promote active teaching and learning. In this research the perception of the undergraduates are studied in terms of using internet to learn Communication Skill, a compulsory subject for every student who are doing degree course to take and pass in the first year of their studies in Institut Teknologi Brunei.
1.1 Statement of Problem

Despite the numerous potential advantages of using technologies in teaching Communication Skills, many universities fail to use technology effectively which may be due to issues such as time constraints, lack of technological facilities, lack of knowledge and experience in the use of technology, and lack of access to computers, insufficient funding [2]. These constraints also impact the use of internet in the teaching of Communication Skills at the Institut Teknologi Brunei, where a shortage of technological facilities has been identified which is being rectified gradually.

Over the last few years, all students and staff have been able to access wireless network in the campus to improve the quality of education. However, there is no proper language laboratory that can be used for Communication Skills classes in the university. Communication Skills is a compulsory subject that every first year student must take and pass. Therefore this study is a start to a long journey, where the perception of students are studied first, before going further onto the proposal of technical facility preparation for Communication Classes in the university. The aim of this study was to determine what issues impacted on the teaching of Communication Skills using internet.

1.2 Objective of the study

In order to achieve the aim described above, the study attempts to achieve the following specific objectives:

i. to investigate ITB students’ perceptions of their level of internet use for general purposes
ii. to investigate the use of internet for Communication Skills learning purposes
iii. to find out the relationship between students’ use of the internet for general and Communication Skills purposes
iv. to examine the differences in students’ use of internet which can be attributed to gender

1.3 Scope of the study

The study focuses on the perception of the first year engineering students on the use of internet to study Communication Skills. In order to conduct this study, 75 first year engineering student were randomly chosen. The data were collected using questionnaire.

1.4 Significance of the study

Good technology facilities in a university may not promise good use of technology in a Communication Skills classroom unless the objective of using technologies in university is studied and implemented. This study investigated the graduates’ perception of learning Communication Skills through internet. By conducting this study, educators can take the opportunity to promote active teaching and learning using internet, as the popularity continues to grow and becomes inseparable from the students. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable information about using internet to teach Communication Skills. This study may also provide a potential point of reference in quantitative literature and establish grounds for further research in this area.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section the studies related to this research is discussed. A number of studies have been done on the impact of computer technologies in the teaching and learning.
According to Ahmad Khalil and Sulaiman [2], research has shown that students who use computers with supporting activities that reinforce the major objectives of the programmes have significantly greater developmental gains when compared to students without computer experiences in similar classrooms—gains in intelligence, nonverbal skills, structural knowledge, long term memory, manual dexterity, verbal skills, problem solving abstraction, and conceptual skills as quoted in Haugland [6].

Furthermore, Janada, [8], reported that sophomore students in her research, who took their Speech Communication for one semester using the Digital Computerized Laboratory in listening audio materials and recording their voices, found it more interesting to use CALL and would want to spend more time in the laboratory than in the classrooms [6].

It has also been reported that using computers in the classroom is very important for both teachers and learners since computers can handle a lot of activities and carry out programmed functions at amazing speed. In addition, they can check exercises after students are done, move students gradually from easier to more difficult tasks according to their levels. The computers can stimulate, drill or explain a certain task when students fail to do it successfully (Hoffman, 1996) quoted in AlKahtani [3]. This shows that students can progress in their own pace rather than waiting for all the students to finish certain exercise before they discuss the answers with their teachers. This avoids wasting students’ time unnecessarily, which means effective teaching and learning takes place.

A study researched the effects on students’ motivation of using computers for writing and communication in the language classroom was also found that the students overall had positive attitudes towards using computers and that these attitudes were consistent across a number of variables, including gender typing skills, and access to computers at home.

According to Pramela [10], the primary role of technology in teaching and learning is to create appropriate micro worlds, which facilitate and mediate learners to interact. The wider role of technology is to create networks between groups of learners and instructors and between learners. Blake (1997) states that one of the communicative CALL objectives is to create an environment in which using the target language will lead to a better learning, and that learners will have the chance to improve and develop their English language skills. In addition, Grabe and Grabe, 2000 argue that in many venues, the Internet is used as a means for the achievement of the educational reform. Internet tools are available for everyone to a greater emphasis on student-centered learning, authentic tasks, and performance-based assessment. The Internet, for example, provides learners with opportunities to obtain instant and more interactive feedback compared to traditional media such as textbooks and audio cassettes. It also creates an environment where more self-directed language learning can be realized much more efficiently and effectively. According to Blake (1997), rich multimedia components, low-anxiety, student-centered learning environments, interest-driven materials are other assets provided by the Internet [7].

Besides using computer for learning and online learning, using ICT and eLearning, have become the norm across tertiary educational institutions where students have been identified as stakeholders in the development and implementation of e-online learning (Ling et al., 2001; Petrova and Sinclair, 2005; Lee and Nguyen, 2005). To support online learning, administrative and faculty offices at universities utilize substantial proportions of their budgets to provide this technology for their students.
On the other hand, much empirical research has revealed gender differences in experience with and attitudes towards computer use [1]. Schumacher and Morahan-Martin [13] argued that females have less overall experience with computers, and are more likely than males to have negative attitudes towards computers. These authors found that there were significant differences between males and females in computer experience and attitudes towards computers. It was found that males were more likely to take high school courses requiring computer use, and reported higher skills in applications such as programming, games and graphics. Males were perceived to be more experienced and reported higher skills level with the use of the Internet, except for email, than females. Moreover, Kay [11] also discovered that females had less favourable attitudes toward computer and Internet usage. Shashaani [14] also made a similar discovery where higher levels of interest in Internet usage existed among men than females [5].

Dorup [4], in a study of undergraduate medical students in Denmark, found that most students had access to computers at home as well as used email and the Internet regularly. In addition, Dorup [4] found that males had more access to computers at home, and held more favourable attitudes towards the use of computers in their medical studies compared to females. A small proportion of students reported that they would prefer not to use computers in their studies. Males were also significantly more inclined to replace traditional teaching activities with better ICT resources. Finally, there were favourable attitudes toward the use of ICT as a supplement, as opposed to using ICT or distance education as a replacement to traditional teaching activities [5]. These are some of the similar studies done by other researchers in this area. The similarity or differences between the findings in the literature and this study are discussed later in the paper. In the next section the research method is discussed.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This is a quantitative study and the sample of study consisted of 75 first year undergraduate students randomly selected from three different faculty and school namely Faculty of Engineering, School of Business and School of Computing and Informatics at Institut Teknologi Brunei of the academic year 2014/2015. The study sample consisted of 45 male students and 35 female students.

The quantitative method of data collection was done through the use of a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 3 demographic questions, six questions which cover the students’ use of technology for general purposes and for Communication Skills and one question with 19 items on students’ perception on the use of Internet in Communication Skills class.

Before the actual data collection period, a pilot study was conducted to assess the validity of the research instrument. A total of 10 students who were not from the sample population and 5 lecturers from Institut Teknologi Brunei were involved in the pilot study.

The collected data were analysed using SPSS 20.0 software (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) and presented in the form of frequency and percentage.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings are presented and discussed according to the questions given in the survey. A wide variety of views were expressed by the sample population. Below are the results that show the perception of graduates on learning Communication Skills through internet.
4.1 ITB Respondents Concerning the Use of Internet for General Purposes

The findings based on the Fig. 1 above shows that 53% of the respondents use internet always for general purposes. 19% of the respondents used internet for general purposes frequently and occasionally respectively. Only 5% of the respondents used it rarely, 3% of the respondents almost never use only 1% of the respondents never use internet for general purposes. Based on the result, it is obvious that majority of respondents use internet for general purposes. Since they are already using the internet for general purposes, lecturers could take the opportunity to use the technology for learning purposes.

4.2 ITB Respondents Concerning the Use of Internet for Communication Skills Purposes

The findings based on the Fig. 2 above shows that 36% of the respondents use internet always for communication skills purposes. 28% of the respondents used internet for communication skills purposes frequently. 9% of the respondents used it occasionally. Only 3% of the respondents used it rarely, 13% of the respondents almost never use only 1% of the respondents never use internet for communication skills purposes. Based on the result, it is obvious that majority of respondents use internet for communication skills purposes. Since they are already using the internet for communication skills purposes, lecturers could take the opportunity to use the technology for learning purposes.
Based on the data provided in Fig. 2, 36% of the respondents used Internet for Communication Skills purposes occasionally, 28% rarely used internet for Communication Skills purposes, 13% of the respondents frequently use Internet for Communication Skills purposes, 11% of the respondents always use Internet for Communication Skills purposes and only 9% almost never and 3% never used Internet for Communication Skills purposes. In summary around 60% of the respondents either occasionally, frequently and always use Internet for Communication Skills purposes which covers majority of the respondents are actively using technology for education purposes. This supports the study done by Pramela [10]. With high percentage of students using internet for general purposes and Communication Skills purposes, then lecturers could create an effective environment for teaching and learning using Internet.

4.3 The Areas of Skills in Communication Skills Respondents use Internet

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 3**: The Areas of Skills in Communication Skills Respondents use Internet

The data in the Fig. 3 above show that the respondents use Internet for Communication Skills in seven different areas namely looking for authentic materials (44%), for reading purposes (33%), writing purposes (39%), academic research (39%), online library (25%), speaking (33%) and listening purposes 36%). The majority of them use Internet for all the mentioned purposes.

4.4 Relationship between students’ use of the Internet for General and Communication Skills purposes

The result in Table 1 below shows the correlation between the use of Internet for general purpose and Communication Skills purposes. Based on the result, there is a strong relationship between your two variables. This means that changes in one variable are strongly correlated with changes in the second variable. In our example, Pearson’s r is 0.360. For this reason, we can conclude that there was a strong relationship between the use of Internet for general purpose and Communication Skills purposes. However, we cannot make any other conclusions about this relationship, based on this number. The Sig. (2-tailed) value is at 0.002. This value shows that there is a statistically significant correlation between the two variables.
Table 1: Correlations between the use of Internet for General & Communication Skills Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.360**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.360**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5 Differences in students’ use of internet for personal purposes which can be attributed to gender

Table 2 below show the result of whether there is a significant difference between the use of internet for personal purposes and gender of the respondents. "Pearson Chi-Square" is used for this purpose. The result is seen that $\chi(1) = 2.946$, $p = 2.946$. This tells that there is no statistically significant association between Gender and the use of internet for personal purposes.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests on the Differences in students’ use of internet for personal purposes which can be attributed to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.946*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>4.031</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>1.843</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .40.
4.6 Differences in students’ use of internet for Communication Skills purposes which can be attributed to gender

Table 3 below show the result of whether there is a significant difference between the use of internet for Communication Skills purposes and gender of the respondents. "Pearson Chi-Square" is used for this purpose. The result is seen that \( \chi(1) = 3.651, p = 3.651 \). This tells that there is no statistically significant association between Gender and the use of internet for Communication skills purposes.

The result in both Table 2 and 3 contradicts the research done by Schumacher and Morahan-Martin [13], Kay [11] and Shashaani [14] where their studies shows a significant difference in the use of internet and their classes. However in this study there were no significant differences between the use of internet and general purpose and also between the use of internet and Communication Skills purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>3.651</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>4.515</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 7 cells (58.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .80.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate ITB students’ perception of their level of internet use for general purposes and Communication Skills purposes. Further to this, it always was conducted to find out the relationship between students’ use of internet for general and Communication Skills purposes and to examine the differences in students’ use of internet which can be attributed to gender.

The study shows that students used the internet for both general purposes and Communication Skills actively. It also shows that students owned gadgets and have basic skills on computer skills. Students had a positive attitude towards learning through the use of internet. There was a correlation between the use of internet for general purposes and Communication Skills purposes. Therefore lecturers can use this golden opportunity to use the internet in their teaching and learning process as a learning tool which can make the studies more interesting.

However there was no significant difference in the both the use of internet for general purposes and Communication Skills purpose with gender. Therefore this study clearly shows that gender does not influence the use of the internet for studies. These findings were in
agreement with those reported by Mitra and Steffensmeier (2002), Liu, Macmillan and Timmons (1998) [7].

The study can conclude that lecturers can use the internet to enhance the quality of teaching and learning since students have the basic skills and already in active use of internet for general purposes. ICT is a lifelong learning tool for both lecturers and students, therefore encouraging students to use ICT out of class activities and assignments will benefit for the lecturers and students.

REFERENCES


