Utilizing Online Resources for Speaking and Listening Skills: Teachers' Perspectives in Bangladeshi Context

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Abstract

In this digital era, teachers are often required to employ successful methods like using the web as a type of technology to manage classrooms effectively. This research aims to explore how Private university-based English language teachers perceive the use of websites to help students improve their English listening and speaking skills. This study is based on phenomenological qualitative research and uses a method that looks at education and technology from different perspectives. The participants (18) were chosen from five private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Semi-structured interviews with English language teachers were conducted to collect the data. The findings and analysis showed that using relevant websites and specific content to teach speaking and listening in English can accelerate students speaking and listening skills, as they are motivating and exciting and can help practice the skills inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: online resources, teachers' views, English listening and speaking classes, Bangladeshi private university, and classroom setting.

Introduction

With the significant advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the world is changing, as is the education system. Teaching and Learning in a classroom are no longer limited to concrete textbooks. ICT integration in education is known to facilitate effective learning environments, especially when it comes to acquiring a second or foreign language. Students can engage in collaborative and cooperative learning by working in teams, which allows them to learn from one another (Cummins, 1981). Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential role of internet-based websites in formal education, particularly English language learning (ELL) websites, to facilitate learning and acquire knowledge for non-native English speakers. These platforms provide many resources, including audio and video, for effective language acquisition and practice. According to Macancela (2019), various applications and websites can help teachers improve English language learning by providing dynamic strategies that complement the cognitive approach, improve communication, and reduce ambiguity in traditional ways.

Shen et al. (2015) pointed out that effective websites offer useful information and insights, prompting a growing literature on evaluating overall website information. In order to determine the effectiveness of a website, it is crucial to analyze five key aspects thoroughly. These aspects include objectivity, substance, navigation, currency, and authority (Wilkinson & Others, 1997). Also, it is of utmost importance to consider the abilities, traits, motivations, materials, and potential interaction of users when designing learning websites for teaching or self-directed learning (Furner & Daigle, 2004). Websites focusing on English Language Learning (ELL) offer many authentic resources for individuals learning the language (Alhabdan, 2021; Fuentes & Martinez, 2018). The learning opportunities outside the classroom are essential for students to improve their second/foreign language skills (Language Learning Beyond the Classroom - 1st Edition - David Nunan - J, n.d.). In addition, these websites have simplified the process for educators to discover resources and materials for their students.
Various language learning materials can help students achieve their goals in teaching the target language (Tomlinson, 2003). However, Aguayo and Ramírez (2020) mentioned that although many websites are free of cost and sometimes they offer an abundance of materials, they cannot guarantee the quality of learning resources. Diverse learners have diverse needs to learn a language, and a teacher has to consider this factor while looking for material on a website, thus making it quite difficult to choose and pick. In Bangladesh, particularly in private universities, many teachers now consider online sources or websites to help them in language classes. The teachers relied on course books and CDs for assistance in the past, but the situation has since undergone significant changes. Nowadays, numerous educational institutions provide classrooms that are equipped with high-speed internet and quality computers. These resources are essential for teachers to utilize technology in language classrooms effectively. Also, some teachers are quite tech-savvy and can easily navigate websites and look for useful materials in class. Numerous websites offer various materials, especially for speaking and listening skills, such as audio-video clips, worksheets, etc. However, not all websites are free of cost in the Bangladeshi context, and not all teachers know how to make the best use of these ELL websites. In light of what has been discussed so far, the researchers of this study formed two questions, and they are:

1. How do Bangladeshi English teachers view the effectiveness of English language learning (ELL) websites and online resources in teaching listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh?
2. From the viewpoints of Bangladeshi practitioners, how can the learners make the best use of these websites on their own?

**Review of Literature**

Many ELL websites provide a range of teaching and learning resources, including texts and audiovisual materials that can assist language learners in enhancing their proficiency in the target language (Shield & Kukulska-Hulme, 2006). The advanced technology available today has greatly facilitated the use of ELL websites for individuals seeking to learn new languages. According to Chapelle (2009), these websites provide numerous opportunities for individuals to enhance their language skills and gain knowledge on language-related subjects. Combining learning materials with information and communication technology (ICT) in a meaningful manner enables individuals to effectively utilize the website's learning materials and succeed in their language-learning endeavors (Liu, 2005; Liu et al., 2011).

Abramova and Boulahnane (2019) as well as Rahmt Allah and Mohamedahmed (2021) found that ELL websites, specifically the English-language news website www.breakingnewsenglish.com, effectively enhance language skills. In their study, Abramova and Boulahnane (2019) focused on the website's rich input, catering to various proficiency levels, and its effectiveness in developing linguistic and communicative skills. Rahmt Allah and Mohamedahmed's (2021) study involved 143 participants, and they found that ELL websites provided genuine learning materials that helped them improve their vocabulary. Both studies highlight the importance of ELL websites in enhancing language skills.

In another research, Gunada and Wayan (2017) have examined how YouTube videos can be utilized as an IT-based tool to improve students' English-speaking abilities. This particular study provides a theoretical standpoint on media's potential to improve English speaking abilities. In another study conducted by Nurdini (2018), the author discusses the use of pictures as a means to enhance
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students' English speaking skills. Her purpose is to explore the use of pictures to teach English speaking or conversation in an engaging and effective manner. Nurdini (2018) highlights the importance of using images to help students practice speaking English regularly, even outside the classroom. This approach also aids in better subject memorization and developing English speaking skills. Also, Lestari (2019) discusses the use of vlogs or video blogs as a means to enhance speaking skills. The purposes of that research are to understand the student’s perspective on using video blogs to improve their speaking skills and to investigate the strategies that students employ when using video blogs to enhance their speaking abilities.

Numerous studies have been done on the impact of websites on students' English listening skills. For instance, Ahmed and Abdulaziz (2006) and Chen and Tsai (2007) also studied students' attitudes towards web-based learning. Additionally, a study by Ali & Elfessi (2004) found that 47 University of Wisconsin-La Crosse students had a positive attitude toward using the Internet for learning. They concluded that using the web as an add-on to classroom education and a long-distance instructional medium was an ideal method to enhance learning and provide greater access to education. Chen and Tsai (2007) found that Taiwanese tertiary-level students had a positive attitude toward using the Internet for English learning, such as listening and speaking. A recent exploratory study was conducted on tertiary language EFL teachers to determine their Internet access preferences for EFL listening materials (Kılıçkaya & Krawiec, 2022). The result showed that participants used the Internet to gather educational videos from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers, enabling them to practice listening skills outside the classroom, thereby enhancing their independent L2 learning beyond the confines of the classroom.

Limitations

English Department teachers at only five Dhaka-based private universities in Bangladesh participated in the research. Time constraints prevented the researchers from including other private and public universities. The researchers formulated a Google Form to collect all the data online, and some teachers who were only interested in follow-up interviews were asked to participate. The interviews were conducted through Google Meet.

Methodology

Participants

Eighteen language teachers (11 females and 7 males) from the Department of English at five independent private institutions in Dhaka were selected for this study, and among them, only four teachers were Assistant Professors, and the remaining fourteen were lecturers. We did not include any newly joined teachers for this study; all the participants have more than 2 years of teaching experience. In addition, all these academics already taught or are still teaching language courses in their respective universities. They teach all four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Instruments and Methods

Our study has been done using qualitative research methods. The questionnaire was distributed using a Google form, and the form was emailed to 18 participants. Six items (open-ended questions) were included in the questionnaire, and enough time was given to the participants to fill out the forms and send them back to the researchers. Among all eighteen, six teachers consented to be interviewed via Google Meet. All of their names have been kept anonymous due to ethical policy.
Findings and Discussion

As per ethical considerations and confidentiality, this study keeps all the teachers’ names confidential. They will be mentioned as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14, T15, T16, T17, and T18 respectively.

To begin with, we asked the teachers which websites they usually use for listening and speaking skills in the classroom and numerous websites’ names came up. Among them, five websites were found in common in all responses: Rabdall’s ESL, Dave’s ESL Café, BBC Learning English, TedTalk, and British Council. Some teachers have even mentioned that they also practice English using these websites at home. Such as, T1 commented,

“I am a fan of BBC Learn English. This helped my own listening and speaking skills and I use it with my students as well. I also like using YouTube but for improving pronunciation, I always tell the students to use YouGlish. “

Here is an excerpt from T6 said,

“……I take worksheets from British Council’s website, it’s free and also answer keys are there with clips. Sometimes I play audio from Dave’s ESL, it’s absolutely helpful, it helps me after all. I do not use YouTube that much in class.”

Additionally, T4 said,

“I like TedTalk and BBC Learn English. These two are life savors for English language learners. Of course there are other websites but for these two always work the best. I did use YouTube in some of my classes but did not work very well.”

Hence, all these websites are favored by the language teachers in class.

The second query has been how they think online learning materials help them in their classroom teaching and learning; here are some responses,

“When I play any interesting audio clip in a classroom, learners get more engaged because I have seen them paying attention to what is being said – I like how effective this process is.” [T2]

Also, another teacher commented that

“I use some video clips before I ask my students to come in front of the audience and speak. For instance, if I want them to talk about “Global warming,” I usually play 2 videos where people are having a discussion on global warming and any narrative talking is happening. Then, I ask my students to come one by one and share their ideas on the topic. I believe in this way, students are exposed to more ideas on the relevant topic.” [T7]

Thus, the teachers agree that English learning websites help learners inside and outside the class to improve their listening and speaking skills. Several teachers have mentioned that using websites in class also helps them cover assigned topics in class, and no time is wasted.

For the third question, positive responses were found if they found the e-resources more useful than the course book. Like T10 said,

“I found some websites quite up-to-date and more relevant than some old books, so I like using these websites more”
However, a mixed comment was found, too, as T11 said,

“Some websites are truly useful even than the books but those are paid and for an annual subscription, the amount is too much. So I stick to some free websites and use the textbooks when needed.”

Therefore, teachers mentioned something about websites not being entirely free of cost. Some of them said that they loved features of apps such as Memrise, Preply, and Babbel, but some contents are free, and other features get unlocked once paid a required amount.

The fourth question is about the main features that the teachers seek in a reliable language learning website. We have found five aspects: authentic materials aligned with the syllabi, fit for the level of the students, student engagement, user-friendly, downloadable materials, and assessments with rubrics. Teachers keep these basic things in mind while choosing a good website for their language class, particularly in Bangladesh.

The fifth query is how the teachers think these websites assist students in learning at home independently.

“For listening, there are some good websites which have modules and students can easily listen to the clips and take tests on them and what’s more interesting is these websites are free of cost.” [T15]

“Some websites have speaking topics and students can record their speech and listen to them afterwards. These websites have some sample speeches that help the students formulate their own answers. However, for specific feedback, students send their recordings to their teachers for thorough comments.” [T17]

The teachers are mostly up for the free websites, and they want their students to use them at home as well. Many of them said that there are some students who will not use a site if it asks for a credit card, and in our country, not everyone can use PayPal. So, it would be of immense help to take the best advantage of the free-of-cost websites.

The last question concerns the benefits and drawbacks of using these ELL websites in language classrooms. Below are three comments from three teachers,

“I think, diverse materials and free content are something that make me interested to use these websites in class but I have faced technical issues so it’s better to keep papers ready as a backup plan.” [T18]

“Of course the websites I use allow me to take assorted readymade worksheets so that I am well-prepared for class but not all contents are suitable for our context. I have to admit all the contents are authentic but I have to adapt some worksheets as per the contextual factor in my class. And, some websites do have clips that I cannot show in my class because they are on sensitive issues, so I have to be extra careful to choose appropriate materials.” [T12]
“Using videos in class mean more screen time, sometimes my students and I become exhausted and I understand that I have to thrive for their concentration. So, I have to use the right material for them and for that I have to work extra hour. Also, some websites they are very good, highly effective, they have different types of materials with varied accents that I find amazing, but they ask for dollars to access the premium level materials which is something I cannot afford. So, I stick to the free ones but I have to pick and choose the materials to use in my class.”

Hence, the teachers must remain cautious about what materials to pick for the class. We found that these teachers are positive about using these websites mainly because they offer authentic audio videos and wide-ranging content. Shield and Kukulska-Hulme (2006) and Tomlinson (2003) emphasize the importance of rich and varied teaching materials on ELL websites. These materials, including texts and audio-visual materials, help language users improve their target language. The website’s usefulness is determined by ease, user experience, and interaction design. It should be accessible and user-friendly and include interactive features like quizzes or forums to enhance engagement and promote active learning among language users.

Conclusion

Technology provides teachers and learners with various materials and communication options to improve their language teaching and learning. In order to successfully integrate multimedia technology into language courses, teachers and learners need to be prepared to embrace new roles and utilize the available technology in appropriate ways. In our context, by fostering a positive learning environment, expectations, and clear communication, teachers can ensure that students can enhance their academic performance, no matter what online sources they use. Also, if needed, by adapting material to fit the context and learners’ needs, Bangladeshi teachers can use some ELL websites in the language classroom to help students enhance their listening and speaking skills.

References


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