

# The Impact of ICT-based Learning Tools on ESL Learners: A Study on the Role of ICT in Developing Communicative Competence in English Language

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**Abstract – ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has influenced every walk of our life in modern times. Education cannot remain unaffected by the influence of ICT today. In this era of smartphones and handheld computing devices, there have been significant studies regarding the impact of ICT on English language learning. These studies have shown that the use of ICT tools and mobile assisted learning Apps can generate immense possibilities for the learners of a foreign language like English to develop their language skills (Chang & Hsu, 2011). Many such apps are currently available for learning English as a Second Language (ESL) which have proved to be strong pedagogical tools that can be used by teachers to generate interest and passion for learning the language. This study is pertaining to the opinion of the respondents regarding the development of communicative competence in English language by using ICT. Questionnaires were administered to 20 ESL students studying various undergraduate courses in various colleges of Karnataka State. These students were familiar with the use of ICT tools and hence they were asked to express their views on a) ICT devices owned by them b) usage pattern of ICT and c) opinion regarding the impact of ICT on communicative competence. The outcome of the study indicated a positive attitude of the respondents towards the integration of technology to improve the quality of learning.**

**Key Words – Communicative competence, Digital learning, English as a Second Language (ESL), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of digital devices such as smartphones, computers, tablets etc. technology-based teaching and learning has become possible. The implementation digital technology for pedagogical purposes has long been in spotlight in the academic circles, and has been a serious topic of discussion among the researchers. Learning a foreign language effectively means using needed learning strategies (Meschyan and Hernandez, 2002). ICT-based learning is a revolutionary approach to enjoy the whole language learning experience on the Internet. Mobile Assisted Language Learning has become a concrete concept to be thought about, given the following exceptional capabilities of a smartphone to benefit ESL learners:

- Short dialogues as conversational models.
- Recorded audio of texts with the ability to follow along with the printed text while

listening in such a way as to develop both listening and reading skills.

- Text-to-speech and vice versa which is supported by a large number of interactive apps.
- Online web dictionaries with illustrations of common objects and actions, and pronunciation of vocabulary items.
- Translations enabled by certain Apps

With these advantages over traditional classroom teaching, this can easily be the preferred way for most ESL learners, especially those who have a favourable attitude towards technology use. With the recent availability of high speed internet, it has become increasingly easy for the possessors of digital devices to gain access to online language content. In addition, there are so many websites that provide free or paid video lectures to help

students learn and practice English language skills. Language learning becomes quite interesting in this way since students who find it difficult to follow teacher-based instructions in the class can watch the videos repeatedly until they gain mastery of the subject. This also boosts their confidence since they no longer have to worry about the negative feedback they might possibly get from peer groups in traditional classrooms.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Modern technology supports a wide array of features such as digital text, YouTube videos, audio files, blogs, social media sites etc. which can be extensively used to help students learn independently even beyond the boundaries of the classroom. It has been observed by many researchers that mobility and connectivity of mobile devices on network helps to create a new way for students across different cultures to learn English (Kim, Rueckert, Kim, & Seo, 2013).

The integration of ICT into learning a foreign language like English boosts learners' motivation due to its rich multimedia capabilities which include visual aids, audios, and videos (Altiner, 2011). These can evoke interest among the learners to keep themselves engaged in learning for a longer time. Various social networking sites such as Facebook can engage the learners on an authentic communicative platform which can "facilitate collaborative discussion, exchange of opinions, and critical thinking" (Cheng, 2012). These provide great opportunities for interaction in the target language and contribute to the development of communicative abilities.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A systematic study is needed to find out the tendency of the students to use ICT tools to enhance their language skills. The usage pattern of ICT by the students is also matter of interest. The opinion of the students regarding the effectiveness of such tools to build their communicative skills in English forms the backbone of this study.

As an attempt to throw light on the substantial degree of learning that takes place with the help of ICT, this study was conducted keeping in view the following research questions:

- 1) Which ICT device do the participants of this study own?
- 2) Are the participants comfortable with the use of ICT?
- 3) What is the Internet usage pattern of the respondents?

- 4) How do the students rate the impact of ICT on the development of communicative competence?

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a questionnaire which consisted questions about the ICT devices possessed by students, degree of comfortability with the use of ICT, Internet usage pattern of the respondents and the ratings of the respondents on the impact of ICT on various language skills. 20 respondents had to give details of their ICT ownership and the frequency of access to the internet. The respondents comprised 10 males and 10 females. The students were randomly picked from various colleges both from private and aided colleges situated in rural and urban areas. The dataset thus simulates a real world situation and hence valid for the present study. Graphs were plotted to analyze the data and understand the respondents' the use of ICT as a learning tool. Students were also asked questions about how ICT helps them develop their communicative competence. This field was split up into linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence and their responses were in the form of ratings on a scale of 1 to 5. This was used to analyze the impact of ICT on improving their communicative competence in English language. The researcher has also studied the recent research articles published in relation to the study at hand.

## 5. RESULTS

The graphs plotted based on the data obtained help us to review the current condition of ICT ownership among students in general and how easy it is for them to access these for learning purposes.

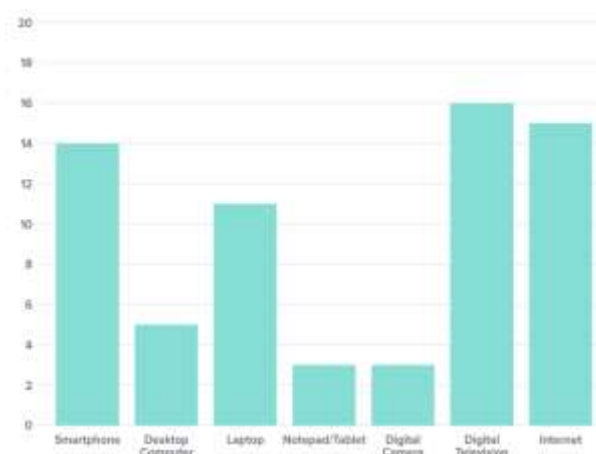
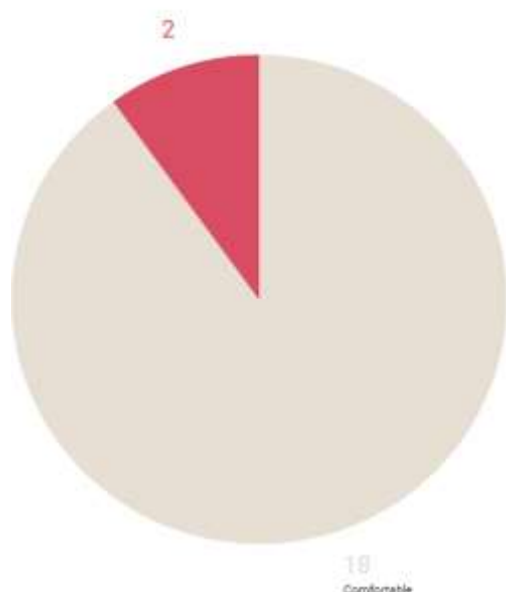


Fig. 1. ICT devices possessed by students

Fig. 1 shows the various ICT devices possessed by students. This information is very crucial to the research topic as the use of ICT for learning is based on the access students have to various ICT

resources. It is clear from the graph that 14 students out of 20 have access to smartphones. While desktop computer, notepad and digital camera show low numbers of 5, 3 and 3 respectively, laptop and digital television is accessible to many students with numbers like 11/20 and 16/20 respectively. This leads us to easily state that more than 85% of the students have access to at least one modern ICT device. The last bar indicates the number of students who have access to the internet. 15/20 students claim to have internet access which is definitely a huge number. We can comfortably say that these students can easily make use of online learning tools and lectures to improve their language skills.

### Comfortable with ICT use



**Fig. 2. Number of students who are comfortable with the use of ICT**

Fig. 2 represents the number of students who are comfortable with the use of ICT. 18 out of the 20 students claim to be comfortable with the use of ICT. This is a very good result owing to the claim that ICT does help language skill development. Only 2 students who were from rural areas did not have proper access to ICT tools or the internet which makes it extremely hard for them to use technology for learning. This observation is quite significant as it shows that the students have proper orientation towards the use of technology. Being comfortable with ICT tools is an important factor to facilitate language learning on the Internet.

### Internet Usage Frequency

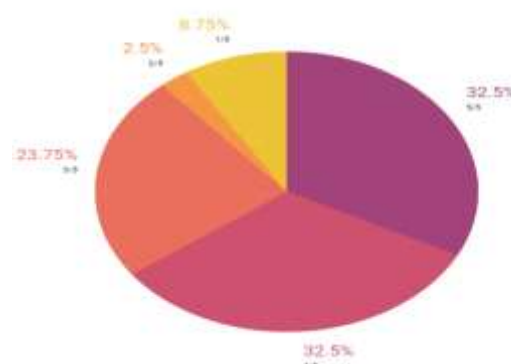


**Fig. 3 Internet usage pattern of the respondents**

Internet usage frequency was yet another factor to get a clear picture of ICT usage among students. Fig. 3 represents the internet usage pattern of the 20 students. The graph shows that 16 out of the 20 people used internet daily. This is a positive response as people with such extensive access to internet can easily use it for learning purposes. One student claimed to use internet often while 2 students told that they rarely used the internet. Only one student responded in the negative stating that he never uses the internet. Though this can be a problem for ICT use in language learning, most students having no internet access can still make use of resources online by going to cyber centres or use college computers for the same.

This observation is also significant as it reveals that a vast majority of the respondents use internet on daily basis. Exposure to the digital content online is the most important factor affecting language learning.

### ICT develops communicative competence



**Fig 4. Ratings by respondents on the impact of ICT on the development of communicative competence**

The pie chart highlights positive 4/5 and 5/5 ratings with 65% of ratings being above average mark. 23.75% of students rated 3/5. Only 2.5% gave 2/5 and 8.75% of students gave 1/5 rating respectively. This stresses on the fact that ICT does help students improve their language competence. High ratings were seen in linguistic and sociolinguistic competence fields showing that ICT helps students improve their speaking skills by boosting their vocabulary and pronunciations. Very few students who rated below average were those who had no ICT ownership or no access to internet. This graph is an evidence for ICT playing an important role in language development.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present study was taken up with the intention of finding out the digital devices owned by the participants of the study and their internet usage patterns for learning purposes. The study has found that majority of the participants own one or the other digital device and 90% of them are comfortable with the use of ICT. And 80% of them use internet daily. An analysis of the data has shown that most of them have a favourable attitude towards technology and are aware of the potential of technology for learning purposes, especially for improving English language skills. Majority of the respondents believe that ICT helps them to improve linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in English language. The findings of this study are quite significant as there is a future research possibility involving a larger group of participants spread over a large geographical setting for better results. In the present scenario of digital technology, the technology orientation of learners can benefit them a lot for mastering English language skills which is much needed for employment.

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