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Andrews University
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What Kinds of Digital Tools
Do ESL Students Use in Order to
Improve Their English Language?

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Abstract

Digital tools have become a part of our lives and the field of English as a second/foreign language is not exempt from this. Students who want to improve their English seek a variety of digital tools to accomplish their goal. The purpose of this research study is to know what kinds of digital tools ESL students use to improve their English and explore how they help in the process of acquiring a second language. Research participants from the Center of Intensive English Program (CIEP) at Andrews University completed a Likert scale survey to know the digital tools that most frequently used. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS to clarify frequencies and percentages, the survey's outputs. The main digital tools used by the ESL students are YouTube (67.0%), Google translate (63.3 %), online dictionaries (37.0%), and Apps (37%). Students identified these tools as the most helpful in helping to improve, extend, and practice their English language skills. However, there was an agreement that English instruction and teachers are essential in the language learning process.

Keywords: ESL, Apps, digital tools, technology.

What kinds of digital tools do ESL students use in order to improve their English language?

Digital tools have become a part of ESL learners' everyday life and also part of the acquisition of a new language. The effect of technology and digital tools has influenced not only the field of language learning, but also other fields such as business, education, medicine, etc. Downes states, "In communities where digital technologies are in abundance, they have changed the way the adults and children relate to and interact with each other and with institutions" (as cited in Brown & Davis, 2004, p. 115). According to this statement, there has been a big change; everything that is related to knowledge is in constant change and development due to time and technology. Teaching English as a second language and the diverse methods have also changed over time, from the grammar translation method to the communicative approach, and still new post perspectives in this area.

Soetaert, Mottart, and Bonamie claim, "Different trends are emerging, giving rise to practice and approaches such as task-based learning, content-based learning, process-based learning, collaborative learning, learner autonomy, and lifelong-learning" (as cited in Brown & Davis, 2004, p. 98). All these methodologies and new trends of teaching language have appeared with the goal to make ESL students acquire a second language. In the emergence of these methods, it seems now that technology is very important as a supportive tool.

Every methodology has its own strengths and limitations, as does technology. However, ESL learners find in digital tools a supportive way to deal with the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, it is essential to take into account what digital tools ESL students use in order to improve their language and to know to what extent these tools are helping them to

achieve their goals. That is why this research project intends to uncover what digital tools ESL students use and to what extent these digital tools are helping them to acquire a second language.

Over the last twenty years, students have made technology and digital tools part of their social and academic lives. Research studies on the use of technology in students such as the 2009 ECAR study of undergraduate students and information technology (Smith, Salaway, Caruso & Katz, 2009) report, “98.8 percent of the more than 10,000 students surveyed owned a computer, 83.3 percent owned laptops, 90 percent sent text messages and used social networking sites” (as cited in Thomas, p. 121, 2011). Now the question emerges: How many of these digital tools are really helpful for ESL students? Given the fact that young people are avid to search for information online, what type of information do they find to acquire a second language? As Kennedy and Judd question, “But how do students approach the task of finding study-related information using the Internet? How do they negotiate online scholarly databases and authoritative sources of information, and integrate these with tools and sources as Google and Wikipedia?” (as cited in Thomas, p. 123, 2011). These are questions that call students to reflect on the kind of information they are looking for, how useful their tools are, and how those tools are helping to improve their language learning. Prensky proposes the term “digital wisdom” to describe the results of this reflection. He defines wisdom “as the ability to find practical, creative, contextually appropriate, and emotionally satisfying solutions to complicated human problems” (as cited in Thomas, p.2, 2011). Digital wisdom is the key for any kind of learner to make the right decision to search for the right tools to enhance their learning process. There are more than popular web sites and common digital tools available for students to use to achieve their goals. Therefore, every ESL student needs to acquire digital wisdom to evaluate what digital tool is the best for his or her goal.

Literature Review

In this current generation, it is impossible to deny that most teachers and students find thousands of digital web sites and tools in order to teach and learn English. This tendency is changing the way English is taught and learned. According to Zhu and Kaplan (2011), “For this generation, computer technology has become as much as a part of the learning environment as the overhead projector and blackboard were for the previous generation” (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 242).

The revolution of the first digital tool was the computer in the eighties, when IBM released the first personal computer. Later on in 1985, Microsoft released Microsoft Windows. Four years later, e-mail became commercialized and the first web server appeared in 1990. The technology revolution has also affected the field of language teaching and learning (Erben, Ban, & Castaneda, 2009, p. 1). “Over the past 30 years drastic changes have occurred in the technologies that intersect with second language teaching, second language assessment, language analysis, and many aspects of language use” (Chapelle, 2003, preface xi).

According to Brown and Davis (2004), there are three goals of modern language education: To be able to speak a second language, to be able to use diverse digital tools and technology, and to have an understanding of intercultural communication. They state, “Digital media offer tantalizing potential to increase access to education, and to intercultural experiences, more generally, that should enhance and broaden education for all” (p. 234). The UNESCO in 2002 stated, “It is now recognized that such potential cannot be realized without the preparation of teachers to use digital media and communication technologies effectively (as cited in Brown & Davis, 2004, p. 234).

In addition, TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) has developed three national technologies standards—both for students and teachers. These national standards point out the importance of knowing how to use different Web 2.0 tools to teach and learn English in a significant way. The first standard affirms, “Language learners demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills in technology for a multilingual world.” The second standard asserts, “Language learners use technology in socially and culturally appropriate, legal, and ethical ways.” The third goal of the technology standards affirms, “Language Learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language-learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning” (Langer, 2010, p.7-8). Therefore, these technology standards should change the traditional way of teaching, which is like the tree structure, a structured traditional system of education. Cornu claims, “New networks allow new kinds of communication between people. The traditional lesson, in which the knowledge circulates only from the teacher to the pupils, must change into a form where the knowledge is considered in a networked form and circulates in a networked way” (as cited in Brown & Davis, 2004, p. 41-42).

Nowadays, ESL students have a broad spectrum of digital tools available on web sites to learn and acquire a new language. Langer (2010) states, “For beginning English language learners in particular, Web-based platforms can also provide a safer, more anonymous space in which to practice English” (p. 3). However, it is essential to ask the following question: To what extent are these digital tools helping ESL students to improve and acquire a second language?

There are two different opinions about the impact of technology on learning and teaching processes; some are in favor of the use of technology and others are against it. It is essential to take into account what Marilla, Svinivki, and McKeachie (2011) state, “For practical and useful

research on the impact of technology on teaching and learning, we should examine students' learning outcomes in cognitive and affective domains in their learning behaviors and strategies . . .” (p. 263). It is known that the Internet offers a variety of web sites where ESL students can practice English language skills and gain also a constant input in English. However, as Ruschoff states, “Theorists as well as practitioners are beginning to accept that a traditional model of learning cannot foster the kind of skills and competences needed to successfully communicate in a target language context” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 46). ESL learners use technology to seek for knowledge, information, and ways of practicing a second language input, but what ESL learners need to go further. Ruschoff claims, “A high level of agency can only be developed by models of learning which emphasize information processing and knowledge construction as the fundamental acts of learning” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 46)

ESL teachers aim to provide this comprehensible input in the classroom, but sometimes this input is not enough for language learners; therefore, they find in technology an extra support tool for their language learning process. According to Bray, Brown, and Green (2004), supportive technologies help ESL students to learn not only in the classroom, but also outside of the classroom. They claim, “Supportive technologies can provide extra help in three ways: remediation, compensation (alternative cognitive tools), or extension (opportunities for greater exploration)” (p. 47). Butler and Wiburg (2003) describe twelve attributes of a successful technology-enhanced language learning environment; this should provide: (a) Interaction, communicative activities, and real audiences, (b) comprehensible input, (c) support for development of cognitive abilities, (d) task-based and problem-solving activities, and (e) sheltering techniques to support language and academic development. Moreover, these should provide (f) student-centered and student autonomy, should facilitate (g) focused development of

English language skills, and use (h) multiple modalities to support various learning styles and strategies. They should support (i) collaborative learning, (j) meet affective needs of students, (k) foster understanding and appreciation of the target and native cultures, and finally they should provide (l) appropriate feedback and assessment. These goals are significant and desirable for a successful combination of technology and language learning. Therefore, these attributes should be meaningful to ESL students when they evaluate the kinds of digital tools they are using to acquire a second language.

It was mentioned in the introduction that it is essential to have digital wisdom to select appropriate digital tools and language learning web sites to learn English. The argument that young people are more familiar with technology and digital tools does not necessarily mean they know everything about the attributes of a good language learning web site or certain applications. A variety of software, tutorial videos, and expensive programs are being offered by companies and web sites in order to help learners to learn the English language. Some companies promise language learners that they will acquire the language in less than three months. The discriminatory process of selecting which digital tool is the best for language learning is important. As Holtzman states, “The process is essential because tools are not neutral entities, and they must be integrated in a thoughtful manner consistent with ‘best practice’ standards” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 526).

Thomas (2011) states, “Many undergraduates have only a basic familiarity with the commonly used information and communication technology (ICT) functions, and many fewer are concerned with creating multimedia content rather than merely searching for it, usually in unsophisticated ways” (p.7). Therefore, an examination of We 2.0 tools is crucial for inclusion as supportive technology in the language learning process. Holtzman claims, “Any process of

inclusion should begin with a review of pedagogy and an analysis of the tool to be integrated” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 533).

Another way to evaluate the quality of digital tools and language learning web sites ESL learners use is to see what they do with these supportive technologies, what their learning outcomes are, and how these are helping in the acquisition of a second language. Chapelle (2003) claims, “One approach to understanding technology use is to carefully observe learners at work” (p. 97). However, it would be very useful and meaningful for researchers to evaluate not only the learning outcomes, but also the process step by step and what ESL students do with technology. Chapelle states,

After all, what could be more informative for software developers and researchers than the moment-by-moment description of how learners chose or failed to choose sections of the material or help options, how they responded to questions, and the length of time they spent on various parts of a multimedia environment. What could be better for a teacher than to be able to observe, reflect on, and respond to the language that learners engaged in during an on-line discussion? (p.97-98)

Therefore, evaluation of the use of technology and language learning is crucial. There is plenty of research regarding the advantages of using technology in the classroom, but there is not enough research regarding the disadvantages of using technology in the language classroom. According to MacWhinney, “Up to this point, system design has proceeded on the basis of a series of hunches and guesses” (as cited in Chapelle, 2003, p. 69). Implementation of technology in the language classroom has been made based on the fact of guessing what the latest technology is, but it is essential to take a careful evaluation to decide whether this kind of

technology really helps ESL learners. What is needed is an evaluative research on the effectiveness of technology for language learning (p. 69).

It is a reality that technology and digital tools for language learners have their own advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, it is important to understand the limitations of technology are, so that ESL learners and teachers may explore the effectiveness and also the drawbacks of digital tools and web sites to enhance language learning. Basic language learners rely more on digital tools, such as Google translator, English tutorial videos, online dictionaries, and certain Facebook pages that promote English practice. They use these web sites when they are in the very first stages of language acquisition. However, intermediate and advanced language learners turn to these web sites when they do not understand certain grammatical structures or when they want to improve their English pronunciation. Additionally, one of the main reasons why language learners use different web sites and digital tools to learn English is because they feel safer and have less anxiety. A study was conducted in 1990 by Lam about an ESL learner, Almon, in the US who began using the Internet as a means for developing his English language through his interest in a Japanese singer (See Table 1).

Table 1
Summary of an ESL learner's comments *before* and *after* entering Internet discourse communities

Before Internet	After Internet
"English is my biggest problem"	"I've improved, it's because of ICQ or e-mail or other reasons..."
"It's like this place [the US] isn't my world..."	"...Now I feel there's nothing much to be afraid of... it was my [Internet friends] who helped me to change and encouraged me."
"... My English won't be that good even in 10 years."	"I'm not as afraid now."

Source: Summarized from Lam 2000:467-468) (as cited in Chapelle, 2003, p. 13.

It is not surprising that technology, the broad varieties of digital tools, and the apps (applications) for learning English have changed the interactions and communications in the ESL field. This fact is significant, because the field of teaching and learning English has been affected by the development of technology. These two fields, technology and English as a second language, are changing and expanding rapidly in many aspects of methodology, assessment of learning outcomes in language learners, and new principles in the teaching-learning language processes.

Information revealed by the current project will benefit the researcher, and help ESL students and TESOL teachers to know the effectiveness of digital tools in the acquisition of a second language. As Chapelle (2003) claims, “The bond between technology and language use in the modern world should prompt all language professionals to reflect on the ways in which technology is changing the profession of English language teaching in particular, and applied linguistics as a whole” (p.1). Not only that, but also this research project aims to identify what kind of digital tools ESL students use and what they seek to gain from their use as a way to remediate, compensate, and expand their English acquisition.

Research Questions

The present research study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the digital tools ESL students use in order to improve the English language learning process?
2. How useful do they find these digital tools in the acquisition of a second/new language?

Method

Instrument

The study employed a questionnaire made up of 44 questions, and 26 of them employ a Likert Scale format (quantitative questions), which elicited important information about the frequency, purpose, and the use of digital tools. There are six items on the questionnaire that are open-ended questions (qualitative questions), which explore deeper thinking and opinions about the use of digital tools in the acquisitions of a second language. Five are multiple-choice questions (quantitative) and seven items are information questions (qualitative). These seven items refer to demographic population, specific digital tools used to learn and acquire a second language. The 26 items were answered on a five-point Likert-type Scale with the answer options of “I definitely disagree”, “I tend to disagree”, “I am not sure”, “I tend to agree”, and “I definitely agree” (See Appendix).

Participants

The study was conducted at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan between November 2013 and January 2014. The participants were recruited from the Center for Intensive English Programs at Andrews University and consisted of students mainly from Asia, South America, and Central America. They were recruited via e-mail solicitation, from the 70 ESL students; 30 responded to the e-mail invitation to participate in the survey. They belonged to the three different levels of English: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. Thirty ESL students participated in the present research study; they are from the three different levels of English. Of these, 60% were females and 40% were males. The demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics (N= 30)

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	12	40.0
Female	18	60.0
Mother tongue		
Korean	11	37.0
Portuguese	06	20.0
Spanish	11	37.0
Chinese	01	3.3
Turkish	01	3.3
Level of English		
Basic	19	63.3
Intermediate	04	13.3
Advanced	07	23.3

Age for 30: M=27.03 and SD=8.12

Data Collection

The questionnaire was completed by thirty ESL students at 4141 Administration Drive in Nethery Hall at Andrews University. At the beginning of the meeting, the researcher introduced a brief PowerPoint presentation based on the different kinds of digital tools ESL students use in order to improve their English language learning. After the presentation, they were given the questionnaire to be completed after the class period. It was important to administer this questionnaire at the end of the fall semester due to the fact that most of ESL basic students became familiar with the English language. By the end of the semester these students had already used different kinds of digital tools to mediate and complete their language learning process.

Data Analysis

Using the Likert Scale survey, research participants responded with the range of their opinions according to the statements. The data and the nature of the variables were the following: demographic characteristics (nominal variables), open-ended questions (ordinal variables), and

the Likert Scale (interval variables). The software used to analyze the data was SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Results

The data collected through a survey were statistically analyzed. The analysis and presentation of data are shown below:

Research Question 1: What are some of the digital tools ESL students use in order to improve their English language learning process?

Table 3
Frequency of use of digital tools by ESL students

Digital tools	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	87.0
No	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 3 illustrates that most of the ESL students have a high frequency use of digital tools, which implies that they own digital tools for multiple purposes.

Table 4
Digital tools used by ESL students

Digital tools	Frequency	Percent
Twitter	2	7.0
Facebook	14	47.0
YouTube	20	67.0
Google docs	10	33.3
Word press	1	3.3
Skype	5	17.0
Wikipedia	6	20.0
Moodle	2	7.0
Ever note	0	0
Slide share	0	0
Blogs	3	10.0
Google reader	4	13.3
EduGlogster	0	0

Edmodo	0	0
Adobe connect	0	0
Apps	11	37.0
Pinterest	0	0
iTunes	4	13.3
Google translate	19	63.3
Online dictionaries	17	57.0
Quizlet	1	3.3
Wikis	0	0
Portfolios	0	0
Podcasts	0	0
Others:		
Thesaurus	1	3.3
Online videos	1	3.3
Electronic dictionaries	1	3.3

As Table 4 illustrates, YouTube tutorial videos (50.0%), Google translate (63.3%), online dictionaries (57.0%), and Applications (Apps) (37.0%) were used the most to acquire English proficiency.

Regarding the perception as to the preference between online versus classroom learning, 93% of ESL learners reported that learning English in a classroom setting is much more effective than learning online. Ninety-three percent of ESL learners reported that they use digital tools as supportive technologies in their language learning process and sixty percent of the ESL students reported that digital tools should be used in the English instruction.

Table 5
Kinds of digital tools that should be integrated in the English instruction

Digital tools	Frequency	Percent
PDA	6	20.0
iPad	6	20.0
Computer and laptop	13	43.4
Interactive boards	3	10.0

Concerning the appropriate digital tools in the classroom, less than half of the ESL students (43.4%) reported that only computers and laptops should be integrated in the English instruction,

whereas only 10% of the students reported that interactive boards should also be integrated in the instruction (See Table 5).

Table 6
Reasons why ESL students use digital tools

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Accessible at anytime	2	7.0
Accessible at anywhere	1	3.3
I learn vocabulary	3	10.0
Online support	1	3.3
Information	3	10.0
Easy	4	13.3
Extra help to the learning process	9	30.0
Practical	5	17.0

When asked why they used digital tools, one third of ESL students reported they use digital tools because they need extra help in the language learning process (See Table 6).

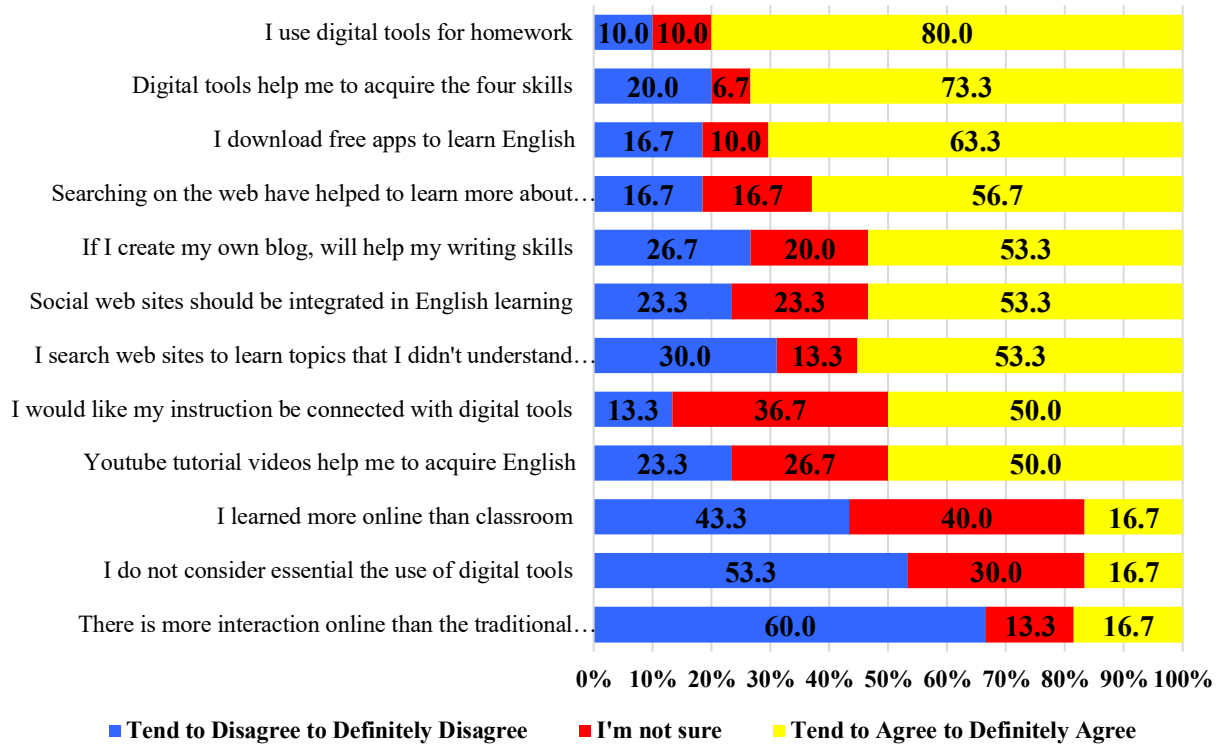
Table 7
E-learning or classroom instruction

E-learning or Classroom instruction	Frequency	Percent
E-learning	1	3.3
Classroom instruction	23	77.0
Both	4	13.3

ESL students were asked whether they prefer learning English online or in the classroom setting; 77% of ESL students reported they prefer classroom instruction to acquire a second language rather than relying only on E-learning.

Research Question 2: How useful do they find these digital tools in the acquisition of a second language?

Table 11
Usefulness of digital tools by ESL students



The analysis of the participants' perception of the usefulness of technology in the acquisition of a second language is shown in Table 11. ESL students reported that digital tools are very useful to extend, to explore, and to remediate concepts and topics in English. On the other hand, there were nine main reasons why ESL students considered Web 2.0 useful in the acquisition of a language. First, they used digital tools for doing homework; second, they reported digital tools helped them to acquire the four skills. Third, they found various apps in English to download; fourth, they reported searching on the web sites helped them to learn more about the American culture. Fifth, they believed that writing their own blog helped them to improve their writing skills; sixth, they reported that social web sites should be integrated in the English instruction. Seventh, they searched web sites to remediate some language problems or

topics they did not understand in the classroom. Eighth, ESL students reported they would like their instruction to be connected with digital tools. Finally, they reported YouTube tutorial videos helped them to acquire English.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to identify some of the digital tools ESL students use in order to improve their learning language process and how useful they find these digital tools in the acquisition of a second/new language. The results indicate that the main reason why the participants use them is because they provide an extra support for their language learning process. Eighty-seven percent of ESL students at Andrews who participated in the study use digital tools to improve their English language. Chen (2010) claims, “Three themes that emerge due to the use of digital tools and technology include: creation, collaboration, and teaching; these are the ways students are using digital media for new forms of learning” (p. 227). In addition, Brozek and Duckworth (2010) state, “Technology helps English language learners find a voice, easing the transition to a new language” (p. 10). Technology and the use of digital tools are shaping the way people live nowadays. It is not necessary to teach students how to use digital tools, because they are “digital natives” a term coined by Marc Prensky to describe the youth generation who were born digital. Chen (2010) states, “They are marching through our schools, carrying a transformational change in their pockets in the form of powerful multimedia handheld devices” (p.213). Certainly, ESL students see in technology and digital tools sources of extra information for their learning process. ESL teachers and policy makers should be aware of this reality and take this information into account when designing teaching methods and policies.

YouTube video tutorials, Google translate, online dictionaries, and Applications were the digital tools used the most by the research participants to learn English. Alexa (2011) claims,

“YouTube is the third most visited web site in the world, behind Google and Facebook. Since its creation in February 2005, YouTube saw rapid growth, sixteen months after its creation, 100 millions clips were being viewed per day” (as cited in Cayari, 2011, p. 2). YouTube offers not only musical videos, but also other options, such as different channels and supportive tools where ESL learners can find diverse topics, like grammatical structures, pronunciation, writing, and listening. Even though these tools are considered useful for language learners, it is essential to know the advantages and disadvantages of these tools and make deliberate, informed decisions as to which tools to use. It is also important for students to understand that they should not entirely rely on these tools and why not. For example, some ESL YouTube channels are not accurate and have some pitfalls. Therefore, ESL teachers and students should discuss in class what digital tools and which channels are relevant and meaningful in the acquisition of a second language. Evaluation of YouTube channels is important so that ESL teachers and students as they decide which one is the most appropriate to use when learning English; this evaluation might be done in class with students.

YouTube and YouTube Education have been used by many ESL teachers in their Flipped instruction or classrooms; with this new methodology, teachers are recording their lectures and posting on YouTube, so that students watch them and take notes, create questions, and develop thoughts to be discussed in class. However, Goodwin and Miller (2013) claim,

To date, there is not a scientific research base to indicate exactly how well flipped classrooms work. But some preliminary non-scientific data suggest that flipping the classroom may produce benefits. In one survey of 453 teachers who flipped their classrooms, 65 percent reported increased test scores, with particular benefits for students in advancement placement classes and students with special needs, 80 percent reported

improved students attitudes; and 99 percent said they would flip their classrooms again next year. (p.78)

YouTube tutorial videos have learning potential for ESL learners; South, Gabbitas, and Merrill (2008) conducted a design process case study research regarding the design of videos to contextualize content for ESL learners, and the conclusions of this research project are the following: rich contextualization, greater depth, high engagement, authentic language and culture.

On the other hand, 63% of ESL students reported they use Google Translate. Ricoeur notes, “Linguistic diversity reflects the fractured reality, often including the necessity for translation, within which any basis for understanding and knowledge acquisition of necessity must begin” (as cited in Hillis, Petit, and Jarret 2013, p. 82). Basic ESL learners in this study used this tool in a great frequency. Google Translate offers not only the definition but also the pronunciation and the morphological aspect of the word, whether it is a verb, a noun, or an adjective with respective examples. However, ESL students tend to translate long paragraphs or when they need to write essays or summaries they trust Google translate, but it does not give the accurate translation to their written words.

Google has a variety of applications. However, ESL students use only the surface of this giant technology company, using only Google Translate, when they might explore more about this digital tool. Therefore, it is essential to know more about Google and the different applications it offers not only for learners, but also for teachers. For instance, Word, Excel, and Power Point Presentation allow students and teachers to share different documents online. “These applications allow students and teachers to create documents, share calendars, e-mail, chat, and create web pages, video, and more” (Nevin, 2009, p. 35). One of the most popular

applications used is Google Docs, an online word processing system. This allows working in and out of class for collaborative writing activities between ESL instructors and language learners.

Facebook was also mentioned by 47% of the subjects as one of the tools they utilized to learn English. Facebook, one of the most visited social sites on the web, offers to its users more interaction with other people. How can Facebook be a language-learning tool? Awl (2011) states, “Communicating on Facebook doesn’t just happen in words—it happens in special nonverbal messages” (p. 101). Facebook has become a friendly social site for people desiring to interact in different ways. However, ESL students might use this tool more for social interaction purposes rather than learning English. What ESL students should do is to create a Facebook page for learning purposes; of course an ESL teacher’s guidance is important to evaluate the outcomes of this project.

More than half of the ESL students (57%) who participated in this study reported that they use online dictionaries as a quick reference for words and vocabulary that are not familiar to them. This is essential in the first stages of language acquisition. Being able to understand words in order to construct more complex sentences is essential for Basic students. According to Nurmukhamedov (2012), “Although these monolingual online dictionaries contain definitions, pronunciation guides, and other elements normally found in general used-dictionaries, they are compiled with native or near-native speakers of English in mind, not for learners of English” (p.10). Therefore, it is important that ESL students are aware of this reality and teachers should lead them to choose the right dictionaries according to their needs, and also for the purposes of the English they are pursuing, such as academic, business, religious, etc. Nowadays a variety of online dictionaries are available in the market for ESL learners, such as Cambridge, Longman, Mac Millan, etc.

Nesi, Haill and Rizo-Rodríguez state, “Research on dictionary use in second language teaching indicates learners of English gain much when they become familiar with dictionaries’ features” (as cited in Nurmokhamedov, 2012, p. 10). Additionally, once students learn how to use online dictionaries, their vocabulary becomes richer. One advantage of online dictionaries is the access to pronunciation, examples of the vocabulary in many contexts, and also an explanation of the grammar concerning the word. Nurmokhamedov (2012) suggests five characteristics of an excellent online dictionary: “The best online learner dictionary includes (1) a corpus-based compilation of words; (2) word frequency data; (3) collocation guides; (4) authentic examples of how words are used; and (5) topical vocabulary from different disciplines” (p. 10). Therefore, taking into account these characteristics of a good dictionary, ESL teachers should lead students to choose a good dictionary according to their needs.

Arnold and Brown (1999) claim, “Language acquisition occurs in context because students learn languages best when there is an emphasis on relevant, meaningful content rather than on the language itself” (p. 235). Those contexts are not necessarily found in the traditional classrooms, unless the ESL teacher creates a collaborative learning environment. Students find their own contexts in the digital world, because they are safe, nonthreatening, and the level of anxiety in participation with their peers is lower.

Now, after analyzing the main outcomes from the survey, it is important to answer the following questions: How useful are these digital tools for ESL students? To what extent are these digital tools helping them to acquire a second language? Basically, ESL students use YouTube, Google Translate, online dictionaries, and Applications as a quick reference to remediate immediate problems they have with English, such as grammar, reading, and writing. In addition, they use these digital tools as an extra support for homework. Applications (Apps)

were one of the most salient digital tools ESL students used; the PDA (personal device assistant), such as smart phones, iPads, and iPhones offer them a broad variety of free applications to download apps such as: SMART speaking, the Sherlock Holmes collection, Story corps, Tongue Twisters, TV.com, Video Vocabulary, Duolingo, Learn English British Council, Hello-Hello, Word Power, etc. Each one of these offers ESL students opportunities to learn, practice, and reinforce different skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. “Software programs for beginning-level students let them connect words and sentences to pictures or animation in context of a particular setting to assist in comprehension” (Butler & Wiburg, 2003, p. 85).

On the other hand, for Advanced-level students applications such as Pronunciation Power—which imparts the acquisition of segmentals and supra segmentals in pronunciation—allow them to practice advanced topics. These applications are designed according to the student’s level. Arnold & Brown (1999,) claims, “Language acquisition occurs in context because students learn languages best when there is an emphasis on relevant, meaningful content rather than on the language itself” (p. 235). These contexts are not necessarily found in the traditional classroom, unless the ESL teacher creates a collaborative learning environment. Students find their own contexts in the digital world, because they are safe, nonthreatening, and the level of anxiety in participation with their peers is lower. ESL students did not specify what type of applications they use to learn English, however ESL teachers can find thousands of these applications online, these applications might be used in the language learning process as instruments.

Additionally, ESL students found enough material on the web to learn more about the American culture, and they also believed that using digital tools really helps them to practice the four skills of English. The extent of the impact on ESL students’ language learning was

demonstrated by their answers on the Likert Scale survey (See Table 11), in which ESL students claim that digital tools are an extra support for remediating language problems in areas such as homework, assignments, the need for practicing the four language skills, the exploration of downloadable applications to learn English, and YouTube tutorial videos to reinforce language learning.

On the other hand, ESL students reported that learning English in a classroom setting is more effective than online learning. Fuchs and Akbar (2012) conducted a study to find out the benefits and challenges of using technology with ESL adult learners. One of the drawbacks was that “technology cannot substitute for face-to-face communication” (p. 163). One of the teachers according to Fuchs and Akbar (2012) reported, “I try not to force technology into my teaching plans. If there is a way that a live discussion can accomplish the same thing I prefer a live discussion, possibly with onscreen images” (p.163). Even though 87% of ESL learners reported they use digital tools to learn English, more than 93% of them believe learning English in a classroom is more effective than the online environment. Technology may offer great advantages to the teaching and learning of English, yet teachers play an important role in the acquisition of a second language. Despite the latest trend of integrating technology into ESL programs, it seems that technology is not completely the answer to the dilemma of language learning and teaching.

Therefore, it is critical to evaluate educational technology before teachers decide to implement it in their daily teaching; the implementation of technology in the curriculum should be based on a deep analysis and evaluation of what works in the particular institution, or program according to its needs and realities. Additionally, a classroom research is essential to explore to what extent technology is helping ESL students. The tendency is a top down method in the design of the curriculum. This requires people to accept new ideas and philosophies that promise

to revolutionize the teaching-learning process. However, not everything that is new fulfills such promises of revolution, which is why communication among institutions and people who are in charge of the implementation of technology in the classroom is vital. Such a discussion would help to crystalize the objectives of language teaching.

According to what these ESL students reported, technology is a supportive tool, whereas teachers are irreplaceable in the learning process. The interaction in the classroom is fundamental not only for ESL teachers, but also for language learners. According to Crandall, “Small group or task-based learning affords students the opportunity to develop a range of cognitive, metacognitive and social, as well as linguistics skills while interacting and negotiating in the classroom” (as cited in Arnold, 1999, p. 226). Collaborative learning and the interactions that ESL learners have in the classroom illustrate the main concept of the social constructivist theory. Elliot claims, “Each of us constructs a personal knowledge base through interaction with the environment around us” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 438). Therefore, technology plays an important role in the acquisition of a second language, but teachers are essential in the interaction as human beings. Even though ESL learners believe and use digital tools, they report that the classroom environment helps them to learn with their peers collaboratively.

Towndrow and Vallance used a list as a point of reference in order to develop a set of criteria for instructors when considering integration of technology in their daily practice. They state that “technology implementation should: (a) encourage discussion, consultation and sharing, (b) focus upon process and product of task and learning objectives, (c) integrate multiple-media, (d) allow access to a wide range of information, (e) facilitate and/or negotiate students’ periodic outcomes, (f) provide a channel for feedback and assessment, (g) be flexible in

when and where learning occurs, and (h) question whether the activities required in the task process can be done ‘without’ information technology (IT)” (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 6).

According to Bray, Brown, and Green (2004), “Supportive technologies directly address issues of learning and the curriculum. Supportive technologies can provide extra help in three ways: remediation, compensation (alternative cognitive tools), or extension (opportunities for greater exploration)” (p. 46-47). The ESL learners reported that they usually count on digital tools as a supportive technology when they did not understand the class or when they encounter difficult grammar topics. The varieties of web sites where they can find virtual explanations to the most difficult topics in English make ESL learners participate in sites such as chat rooms, discussion forums, and YouTube channels in order to be immersed and learn English.

Various researchers have suggested that ESL teachers should be aware of the kinds of digital tools ESL learners use because language teaching might be more meaningful if teachers would use some of the same digital tools in the classroom. However, an evaluation of these digital tools must be done with the ESL learners to discuss which ones are the most appropriate to be used in class. Langer (2010) stated, “Students come to us with pre-established positive relationships to these technologies. What better way to motivate, excite, and connect to our students than to dive into media that they already know and love?” (p. 4).

According to the findings of this study, many ESL students use the most popular digital tools used by the population in general such as YouTube, Facebook, Google, and other Applications (Apps), such as SMART speaking, Story corps, Tongue Twisters, Duolingo, Learn English British Council, Hello-Hello, Word Power, etc. Even though the tendency is to encourage ESL students to turn to technology as a modern tool to learn English and other skills, they still believe instruction is a key element to acquire a second language. Students state that

technology and digital tools are only an extra support for them, and these tools do not replace what teachers do every day in the classroom setting interacting with their students.

In regards to the second research question, most ESL students seemed to find these digital tools useful in the acquisition of a second language, for they are a supportive technology when doing their homework and assignments. They also reported digital tools help them to acquire English in areas such as grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and pronunciation. Additionally, free applications help them to learn and practice English on their own. They reported that searching on the web sites has helped them to learn more about the American culture.

Alternatively, only a small percentage of ESL students reported: “I learned English more online than in a classroom (16.7%), and “There is more interaction online than in the traditional classroom” (16.7%). These claims clearly indicate that the students believe that formal instruction is essential; technology is not the ultimate resource to acquire a second language. For them technology is considered as an artifact in the learning process. Therefore, the use of digital tools is only a resource of exploration for ESL learners. According to ESL students technology is not essential in the acquisition of a new language and it is only a tool to remediate learning issues. In other words, technology plays an important role in education; however, teachers are essential in the acquisition of a second/new language.

Limitations

Some of the limitations found in this present research were the time and availability of ESL students to go further with their responses in the survey. The benefit of a face-to-face interview would have been very meaningful to ask for more details regarding their answers in the survey. A combination of statistics and oral interviews is more meaningful to explain the reasons

for their answers. A suggestion for future research on this topic is to allow students to share their own experiences and thoughts regarding technology and digital tools. Another limitation was the size sample. This is a quantitative research study, but the sample was only thirty students and most of them were from the basic level of English. Therefore, in order to make the results more generalizable for this kind of study, it is essential to have a bigger sample size where the output and results would be more visible and accurate. The level of the students was another limitation. Most of them were from the basic level, and may not have understood some of the statements from the survey, and, because of the time, some may have answered quickly in order to finish. It might be beneficial to find out the kind of digital tools ESL students use based on the specific language learners' level of English. Most of the responses come from basic students and advanced level students might use other advanced digital tools or web sites to improve their English language skills.

Conclusions

Certainly technology is transforming the way language learners learn English and changing language teaching pedagogy. Digital tools used by ESL students will promote new approaches in English language teaching. This research study has analyzed the kinds of digital tools basic level ESL students use in order to improve their English language skills. Most of these tools are of a quick reference type, such as online dictionaries and Google Translate. However, ESL students use other digital tools such as YouTube and Apps to remediate their language learning difficulties; they often use these digital tools as compensation for topics that were not understood in class. However, it is essential for ESL students to evaluate what tools are the most effective to acquire the language. The research regarding the fields of ESL and technology are only in the beginning stages of their development in research. Exploration,

evaluation, and analysis are required to determine which digital tools are the most convenient for their language learning. Given the current advancement in technology, digital wisdom based on research is essential for leading ESL students to choose the best tools for learning English language skills. Researchers, teachers, and students need to be aware of the digital tools available so that they can blend them in the classroom instruction. However, technology by itself should not direct the right approach in language teaching. What is essential is to understand the philosophy behind technology and digital tools in order to make decisions in the adaptation of technology in language pedagogy. Professor Larry Cuban (2002) from Stanford University was not convinced to inculcate ICT (Information Communication Technology) into mainstream education. He states:

Although promoters of new technologies often spout the rhetoric of fundamental change, few have pursued deep and comprehensive changes in the existing system of schooling. The introduction of information technologies into schools over the past two decades has achieved neither the transformation of teaching and learning nor the productivity gains that a reform coalition of corporate executives, and educators have sought. (as cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 2)

Additionally, ESL students should not turn to technology only to remediate their English language skills, but ESL students should create new technologies in order to improve their language learning process. ESL learners should not be only recipients of technology information; they should create their own means of language learning through technology. To make this happen, they need to evaluate in their own language learning experience which digital tools are the most significant and how they think they are really helping them to acquire the English language.

Three major efforts might be made in order to incorporate technology and digital tools in the language pedagogy. One is to incorporate technology in the ESL curriculum. The second is to evaluate which digital tools are more effective to be included in the language learning process. The third is to have a healthy balance of face-to-face interaction with the English instructor and the use of digital tools in the classroom.

This research study has shed light on the fact that technology will not always be a solution for language learning issues. Most of the surveyed students reported that formal instruction and teachers are more essential and important in the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, technology is only a supportive tool in the language learning process; the combination of technology and traditional instruction should merge for meaningful language learning outcomes. One of the latest trends in language instruction is flipping the traditional methods into new ones, so that students have positive learning experiences. This method tries to flip the lecture into videos that should be watched by the students at home. This is a new way to explore other methods and techniques to reach language learners. It also has its own strengths and weaknesses, but this new way of teaching might be more effective, because time in the classroom is not enough to cover everything that a teacher has planned for the class.

Digital tools as supportive technologies in an environment of constructivism in the classroom should be part of the new learning and teaching theories. However, the inclusion of this approach should be based on evaluation and research.

Digital tools and technology are complex, but also supportive for language learning. It is essential to have the integration of technology and teachers for meaningful language learning outcomes in the ESL students. Adopting technology has both positive and negative aspects; therefore, regular evaluation of these tools is essential.

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Appendix

DIGITAL TOOLS SURVEY-ESL STUDENTS

Digital tools used by ESL students in order to improve their English language learning.

Directions: Please read carefully each question and then answer:

Part I: Background Information.

1. Name and last name: _____
2. Sex: F M
3. Age: _____
4. Country: _____ Nationality: _____
5. Mother tongue: _____
6. Foreign languages: _____
7. Current level in the ESL Program: Basic _____ Intermediate _____ Advanced _____

Part II: Digital tools

1. Do you use any kind of digital tool to learn English online?
Yes _____ No _____

2. What are some of the digital tools you use to learn English?

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| _____ Twitter | _____ EduGlogster | _____ Other. Please Specify: |
| _____ Facebook | _____ Edmodo | _____ |
| _____ You Tube | _____ Adobeconnect | _____ |
| _____ Google docs | _____ Apps | |
| _____ Word press | _____ Pinterest | |
| _____ Skype | _____ iTunes | |
| _____ Wikipedia | _____ Google Translate | |
| _____ Moodle | _____ Online dictionaries | |
| _____ Evernote | _____ Quizlet | |
| _____ Slideshare | _____ Wikis | |
| _____ Blogs | _____ E-portfolios | |
| _____ Google reader | _____ Podcasts | |

3. Please write the numbers of hours you spend using digital tools in order to study English per day and week.

Learning digital tools	Numbers of hours per day	Numbers of hours per week
1. Twitter		
2. Facebook		
3. YouTube		
4. Google docs		
5. Word press		
6. Skype		
7. Wikipedia		
8. Moodle		
9. Evernote		
10. Slideshare		
11. Blogs		
12. Google translator		
13. EduGlogster		
14. Edmodo		
15. Adobeconnect		
16. Apps		
17. Pinterest		
18. iTunes		
19. Google Translate		
20. Online dictionaries		
21. Quizlet		
22. Wikis		
23. E-portfolios		
24. Podcasts		
25. Other:		

Digital tools	Numbers of hours per day	Numbers of hours per week.
1. iPad		
2. iPhone		
3. Android		
4. Blackberry		
5. Tablet		
6. Kindle		
7. iPod		
8. MP3 Player		
9. Electronic Dictionaries		
10. iPad mini		
11. Electronic books		
12. PDA (Personal Digital Assistant)		
13. Specify other please		

4. Do you think that learning English online is much better than learning English in a classroom setting? If your answer is YES, please explain why?

Yes _____ No _____

Why: _____

5. Do you think digital tools help you to learn English? If your answer is YES, explain in what ways.

Yes _____ No _____

In what ways:

6. Would you like to have a computer lab in your classes as you are learning English?

Yes _____ No _____

Why: _____

7. Would you like your teachers to use the same digital tools you use out of classroom in your English instruction?

Yes _____ No _____

Why: _____

8. What kind of digital technology and digital tools do you think should be integrated in the classroom?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

9. You use digital tools to learn English for these three main reasons:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d.

10. Which one is the best for you: e-learning or formal instruction?

_____ E-learning

_____ Classroom Instruction

Other view: _____

11. Have you made new friends online who are native speakers? Do you chat with them in order to practice your speaking skills in English?

Yes: _____ No: _____

If your answer is YES, how often do you chat with them?

Everyday: _____

Two to three times a week: _____

On the weekends: _____

Other: _____

Part III Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with every statement

N	Statement	I definitely disagree	I tend to disagree	I am not sure	I tend to agree	I definitely agree
1	I use digital tools to learn English, because they are more effective than traditional instruction.					
2	I search many English web sites to learn topics that I did not understand in class.					
3	Digital tools make my English language learning process easier.					
4	I feel that digital tools really help me to acquire the English language in areas like Grammar, Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Pronunciation.					
5	I have learned so much in the online environment rather than the traditional classroom.					
6	I do not consider essential the use of digital tools in order to acquire a second language.					
7	I often use digital tools to do my assignments or homework.					
8	I like to talk and share with my friends about digital tools to learn English.					

9	I spend more time online studying English than studying the English textbooks.					
10	I find problems when I use digital tools in order to learn more about English, because I am not tech savvy.					
11	I think if I create my own blog online, it would help me to improve my writing skills.					
12	I feel very confident to make my own video in English, or create my own podcast					
13	Social web sites should be integrated in the English language learning process.					
14	I find that computer labs at Andrews are a good place to learn and improve English.					
15	My ESL teachers encourage me to use online web sites to improve my English.					
16	The use of tutorial videos on YouTube has helped to acquire English as my second language.					
17	I would like my instruction be connected with digital tools in the classroom.					
18	I download some free apps to learn English by my own.					
19	I assess my own English language learning online					
20	I consider that a teacher of English is much better than a video tutorial or a web site.					
21	There is more interaction online than in a traditional classroom					
22	I have learned to speak better using different web sites.					

23	My listening abilities have improved for the use of digital tools.					
24	Using digital tools and searching on the web sites have helped me to learn more about the American culture.					
25	Writing online is very helpful for improving my writing skills.					
26	I have improved my pronunciation due to the use of digital tools.					