



RESEARCH PAPER**English Language Learners' Perceptions towards the Use of E-learning Tools in Pakistan****Saira Niaz*¹ Niaz Hussain Soomro²**

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ABSTRACT

While living and learning in the 21st century, learners across the world are gradually, rather than slowly, getting exposed to the emerging trends of learning support facilities and environments as they emerge. E-learning is also one such learning support that students are exposed to use at tertiary level learning environments in academically advanced as well as developing countries, such as Pakistan. This paper investigates the extent to which e-learning tools were used by English language learners. It also aims to know their perceptions of e-learning tools during COVID-19. Using mixed method approach, convergent sequential strategy was followed. The data was collected using a questionnaire and semi structured interviews. It was analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis respectively. The results of the study indicate the positive perception of English language learners towards e-learning tools since majority of the learners believed in effectiveness of e-learning. E-learning tools were perceived useful and easy to use by English language learners in their learning process. Furthermore, mobile phone and zoom application turned out to be extensively used tools followed by the use of WhatsApp among all others during COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS E-Learning, E-Learning Tools, English Language Learners, COVID-19 Pandemic, Pakistan

Introduction

E-learning provides learners with the digital tools and resources that may open the doors and minds to diverse learning models (Grimus, 2020). For more than ten decades, the classroom, containing chairs, desks, cabinet and blackboard or whiteboard, remained a prime element in the support of learning and teaching process (Huang, Spector & Yang, 2019). In the mid of 1990, classrooms were introduced with digital technologies that included computers, printers, multimedia projectors, interactive whiteboards, learning software, and the internet. We are living on the stage of integrated CALL (computer assisted language learning) and TELL (technology enhanced language learning) where digital tools have become integrated elements of foreign language learning syllabuses. Recently with the technological advancements, modern e-learning tools were implemented in English language learning classrooms such as digital flash cards, mind maps, mobile phones with its educational applications, electronic dictionaries, weblogs, and web 2.0 tools and so on (Huang et al., 2019). E-learning tools on the web supporting social networking, self-production (via blogs, etc.) offer learners a variety of modes and authentic language learning experiences.

Literature Review

According to Grimus, (2020), the common e-learning tools used by the learners in the current decade are multimedia tools and tutorials, learning management systems, social media and social networks, e-books, internet, online assessment systems, virtual worlds, games, simulations, and interactive resources. The usage of e-learning tools (such as text messages, email, Skype, personal blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) has made possible for the learners to communicate with millions of people simultaneously while being at home physically.

Multimedia Learning Tools

As technology began to be integrated in education in general and in English language teaching in particular, instructors and learners tried various forms of electronic tools for their learning. Teachers had more thirst to get knowledge about innovative tools and to implement those tools creatively in classrooms. With the progression of technology, incorporation of e-learning tools into teaching and learning also increased. Learners have seen teachers integrating variety of tools trying, testing and tossing out. The successful implementation of any tool was determined from its effectiveness in the learning process.

With the rapid development of ICT in education, multimedia became an increasingly important tool used particularly in English language teaching. It provided learners an opportunity to present their material using various visual ways such as text, pictures, audios, and videos (Heinemann & Uskov, 2018). In such a scenario, learning from these visual ways was named as multimedia learning. With its increasing popularity, researchers began to pay more attention to the effective use of multimedia devices to enhance students' learning. As the name implies, multimedia is the single unit medium to use various types of media such as text, graphics, audio, animation, images, videos, etc. It is an integration of multiple types of media. It enables learners to use computer supported interaction integrated with multiple forms of media to present including data, text, moving picture, audio, video, and real time simulations using multimedia equipment such as computer, projector, digital video recorder (DVR), dual integrated viewer (DIV). Brooks, et al. (2002) call it a "comprehensive multimedia delivery system" (p. 23). With the revolutionary role of multimedia in higher education, university learners began to spend more time in interacting with the computers. The use of these tools helped learners to enhance their capability to remember the information as they interpret complicated ideas with the help of animation. Furthermore, the use of visualization and interactivity must be emphasized in learning than merely using the text and audio. Students' use of effective multimedia presentation can increase their motivation level for learning, develop their self-confidence and can improve their learning performance. Furthermore, multimedia is a cost-effective method to provide expert information to a large and diverse audience. It enhanced learning opportunities and provided learners an access to the vast amounts of quick and effective information.

Mobile Phone

Since the invention of smart phones, mobile phone is directly linked to e-learning that guides learners to continue their English language learning beyond the classroom boundary (Kingsley et al., 2016). Due to its autonomous and flexible nature of e-learning, the need of the mobile phone is enormously enhanced in the virtual learning environment particularly. A review conducted by Klimova (2021) indicated the positive effects of mobile phone and mobile applications of English language learning. This study proved mobile learning technology a very useful in learning and teaching scenario. According to Al-

Emran and Salloum (2017), mobile phone offers learners numerous benefits which include interactivity, portability, ubiquity and flexibility.

Zoom Application

Utilized by a great number of students, e-learning is defined as “an access to learning experience via the use of some technology” (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011, p. 130). Though the decision to learn using e-learning technology is often made by the learners themselves yet in the recent with the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning has made compulsory rather than optional (AlFadda & Mehdi, 2021). In the COVID-19 situation, Zoom turned out the most demanding platform for virtual English classes due to its good performance, stability and increased features. It is a web-based learning video conferencing tool containing multiple features including instant text messaging, content sharing, process of joining meetings, convenient in use, indicating if any user has any question or comment, etc. It is also considered as an ideal platform for online classrooms, seminars, webinars, demos as it contains high quality audio video, screen sharing and recording features leading to a collaborative and interactive learning environment. “Zoom’s integrated messaging features effectively streamline workspace collaboration, leading to perceptible increase in performance, trust, and engagement” (Harbi, 2020, p. 317). According to Wu, Tennyson & Hsai (2010), videoconferencing may increase motivation level of English language learners to interact in English with their peers using speaking and writing skills. It provides platform for a synchronous communication for a better student-teacher and student-student interaction. Using different features of Zoom technology (Breakout room, chat room, whiteboard, screen sharing, annotation tools), learners can participate in a variety of English language learning activities that includes debates, group discussion, question and answer session, writing competitions, presentations using slides, sharing language learning files, practicing all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Not only this, but students can also meet individually on Zoom in order to discuss their classroom related tasks and can record their meeting and sessions to show it to their teacher. This is how Zoom has reduced the feeling of social isolation and has increased the sense of community in students.

However, like other new technology, Zoom has also created some technical challenges faced by students and teachers. First, students get distracted due to multitasking using Zoom and therefore virtual classes may take longer time than anticipated (Ferns et al., 2020). Second, it may be difficult for students to access all the features of Zoom at first and therefore they do not bring those features in their use. They take enough time and practice to understand all the features of Zoom. Third, inadequacy or lack of functionality of hardware devices (computers, laptops, microphone, speakers), lack of quiet environment, and lack of unreliable internet connection may lead students to face multiple challenges using Zoom (Ferns et al., 2020).

Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Weller (2020) argues “in educational terms, social media has done much to change the nature of the relationship between academic, students, and the institution” (p. 108). Cho (2015) also counted SNSs as “online communities built by online users who want to share their interest, ideas, information, text messages, photographs, and audio tracks, and/or videos” (p. 350). Learners perceived the use of social media as the collaborative and interactive platform where even the learners who are geographically separated can work together (Manzira, 2020 & Muzaffar, et al, 2019). Starting in early 2000s, these sites allowed learners to create their profiles using Twitter, MySpace, Orkut, LinkedIn, Facebooks, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc., and to connect to the profiles of their peers in order

to share the learning with them. Other features of SNSs include creating conversations and theme related pages, publishing the informative content and building a profile. With the increasing use of mobile and broadband over the last decade, social networking sites became the part of learners' everyday life where they can practice for language. This scenario has captivated increasing attention among applied linguists and foreign language learners and teachers who thought to integrate it in foreign language teaching. Several studies have found this integration helpful to the language learners because they can express themselves using authentic text, practice their English language with other EFL learners and English native speakers, and can also give the new forms and meanings to their online discourses on the SNSs (Al-Jarrah, Talafhah & Al-Jarrah, 2019). SNSs allow foreign/second language teachers and learners to extend their learning beyond the classroom promoting learners' critical thinking, developing their knowledge, and promoting English language learning environment. The direct exposure to the authentic use of English language leads learners to increase their motivation for learning and to have positive attitudes towards English language learning. Moreover, social networking sites are the great source for enhancing learners' motivation with a positive effect of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use that ultimately increase learners' acceptance of e-learning use (Alghizzawi et al., 2019).

Facebook

The increasing use of social media in general and Facebook in particular in education has increased the opportunities for using e-learning among English language learners (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). It prompts interactive online discussions, create social and collaborative connections and communities and offer learners way for receiving and transmitting knowledge (Lin & Lu, 2011). Among all the social networking sites, Facebook is used by billions of the learners across the world (Qureshi et al., 2012; Pervaiz, 2016). It was launched first in 2004 at Harvard University with a purpose to connect students at the university but it soon expanded to the most of the students of the other colleges and universities worldwide creating more opportunities for their online learning. Facebook live sessions were claimed as very convenient and user-friendly method for learners as it does not require particular setting and skills (Muzaffar, et al. 2020 & Khan, 2020).

Some research studies have claimed that Facebook is detrimental to the learners as it distracts their attention and take them away from their studies (Judd, 2014; Junco & Cotten, 2012). Addiction to Facebook is another disadvantage studied by numerous researchers (Farooqi et al., 2013; Milosevic-Dordevi & Zezelj, 2014). These research studies concluded that it could lead learners to have Facebook Addiction Disorder. In contradiction to these findings, Negussie and Ketema (2014) examined the negative relationship between the frequency of login and the usage of time on Facebook with academic performance and achievement.

Facebook in Pakistan

The digital statistics of Pakistan (2020) reported that in January 2020, there were 37 million people who used social media in Pakistan. The people having age 13-17 years and 25-35 years are the highest users (with 29.5 % respectively) of social media among all age groups that was compared to only 8.6% females (for both groups i.e., 18-24 years and 25-34 years old respectively) indicating the great gender difference. According to Raza et al. (2020), the total population of Pakistan was 196,744,376 in 2017 and around 27,000,000 people were active users of Facebook among them 78% were male users and 22% were female users.

Qureshi et al. (2014) explored Pakistani students' perceptions for using Facebook as an e-learning tool. Their study reported the positive response of students towards social networking sites with more inclination towards Facebook for their learning. Raza et al. (2020) investigated factors that determined intensive use of Facebook among the students of Pakistani universities. Their finding revealed that social influence, social relationships, information seeking, perceived behavioural control and attitude are the prime factors that lead university students to use Facebook intensively. Frooqi et al. (2013) postulated that Facebook enable shy students, who are unwilling to communicate to their peers and teacher in their real life, feel comfortable communicating them in Facebook groups.

Indicating the negative outcomes of Facebook in the context of Pakistani educational institutes, Afzal (2012) argued that students in Pakistan preferred to use Facebook than working on assignment that had a negative effect on their academic performance and in result they got poor grades. Pervaiz (2016) observed that Pakistani students are mostly unaware of educational potential of SNSs rather they use these SNSs for entertainment and fun and therefore they are unable to get maximum benefits of them in their learning.

WhatsApp

Another type of SNSs that has the potential in the field of the field of teaching and learning is WhatsApp Messenger that is most commonly used by university students due to its free, easy and convenient use. According to Ahmed (2018), "WhatsApp has become the one of the leading networking websites, which is boom gadget of user globally, killing the minds, growing up bigger than twitter and a trend setter of mobile communication" (p. 28). It is a web and smart phone-based application that allows learners to exchange the learning content and other information via variety of mediums (text, photo, audio, video, and voice message or any document). Due to its appealing features (for e.g., easier and faster interaction), it is frequently used by students on daily basis. It can be accessed from smart phones and from computers as well by connecting to the internet. According to Hussain et al. (2017), WhatsApp has multiple functions available to the learners that include persuasion to learn more and more and to communicate with their peers, conveying updated information, strengthening their efficiency to be autonomous. Therefore, many universities have started integrating WhatsApp by using smart phones in order to develop their language skills via different forums and discussions.

Due to the widespread popularity of WhatsApp among English language learners, several researchers investigated the effect of this tool on their attitudes, perceptions and their learning. In the study conducted by Widodo (2019) students expressed their positive perception towards the usefulness, satisfaction, ease of learning and ease of use in using WhatsApp for their learning. The use of this tool enables learners to be creative, autonomous, and responsible in their learning. Amry (2014) demonstrated the positive effect of WhatsApp based learning in comparison with face-to face learning using the achievement test and attitude measuring scale. She, further, discussed that it helps students to create learning communities via WhatsApp groups where they can share their knowledge and build confidence. Malecela (2016) investigated students' perception towards the use of WhatsApp using qualitative research design. Her study revealed that students perceived WhatsApp as the useful, facilitative and collaborative learning tool where they could share the educational information.

With regard to the English language learning activities using WhatsApp in EFL speaking classes, Plana et al. (2013) claimed that majority of the students in their study were highly satisfied with the integration of WhatsApp in their language learning process

and that also raised their willingness to read English material indicating positive impact of WhatsApp on their reading skills. Students improved their language skills when they used WhatsApp as they experienced low level of anxiety. It assists learners to get mastery in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. Minalla (2018) explored the use of WhatsApp groups to improve EFL learners' interaction. She used the experimental research method using controlled group (who were taught by text messages on WhatsApp) and the experimental group (who were taught using voice messages on WhatsApp). Her findings affirmed that the performance of the students who were taught by voice messages was significantly better as compared to those who received text messages on WhatsApp.

WhatsApp in Pakistan

WhatsApp is one of the most extensively social networking sites globally used by youth including Pakistan (Ahmed, 2018). According to Pakistan telecommunication survey (2014), majority of people in Pakistan have left using traditional text messages and they prefer to use WhatsApp messaging service instead. This indicates the popular use of this tool among young learners too. Hanif and Sajid (2019) conducted their study using the survey in the context of Pakistan to investigate students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp to improve their English language learning skills. Their participants perceived WhatsApp application as the most useful learning tool in their English language learning indicating their positive attitude. It also argued that WhatsApp not only develop the language related knowledge and skill but it is also a great source of building the confidence among students as they feel easy to share their knowledge with their teachers and can also get instant feedback on it. WhatsApp contribute significantly to improve students' reading and writing and therefore it is seen as a motivating tool for learners. Another study in the context of Pakistan reported that the use of WhatsApp was the great source of motivation for English language learners in their reading skill (Khan, 2016). Hussain et al. (2017) studied the frequency of using WhatsApp among the students of University of Sindh (same context as of the current study). They used the questionnaire and collected data using it from 280 students who were further distributed in demographic groups of age and gender, study level and their year of the study. The study found that majority of the students of University of Sindh have their WhatsApp account and their use is quite frequent.

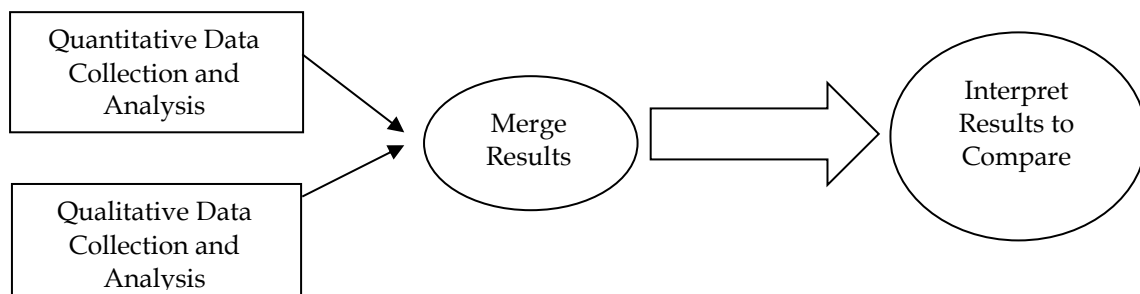
However, this tool also invited some challenges. It does not allow face to face conversation thus creates more gaps for miscommunication (Malecela, 2016). It affects negatively on students' academics language particularly their writing skills as it spoils their spellings and the grammatical construction of sentences (Sharma and Shukla, 2016). In the context of Pakistan, Ali (2016) found that 94% of the students expressed their frequent use of WhatsApp that has ruined their family relationships.

Material and Methods

This study used mixed method approach since the increasing use of mixed methods approach indicates more flexible approach as it addresses the range of complex research problem which may lead the researcher to deal with the participants from both subjective and objective point of view (Sammons, 2010). Keeping this importance in mind, I intended to use mixed methods research approach which "included the use of both quantitative and qualitative in a single study" (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p. 557). Therefore, it did not only rely on numbers and percentages but also explained in-depth understanding of participants' preferences for using e-learning tools. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), mixed methods research allowed integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same study to cover the limitations of one approach with

the help of the other. In other words, the collection of both forms of data (quantitative and qualitative) neutralizes the weakness of each form of data and resultantly the research becomes more accurate, deep, valid and reliable (Denscombe, 2014). Moreover, among “three core mixed method designs” (p.307), as identified by Creswell and Creswell (2018), this study used the convergent mixed method design in which the qualitative and quantitative data is collected separately and the findings of these both form of data are compared with each other to check whether or not these both forms of data confirm or disconfirm each other. Using this convergent method, it used semi-structured interviews and online survey instrument to know English language learners’ use of e-learning tools. Furthermore, data for this study was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic when Pakistan government announced the closure of all educational institutes and commenced online education. Following the quantitative research method, random sampling was used to determine the population of the study. There were 440 participants who were enrolled in various departments of University of Sindh that included English language and literature, English linguistics, English literature, Psychology, Business administration, Islamic studies, Political science, and Criminology. All of the participants were enrolled in BS part 2 and were taking functional English course at their universities. Moreover, as mentioned above, the qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling technique was used in this phase with a purpose to obtain to obtain insightful information of the phenomenon. Interviews were taken from 10 Students of BS-I and BS-II who were purposefully selected as the students of these batches were attending English language course entitled “Remedial English” in their respective departments. Moreover, during the pandemic COVID-19, all of them were taking online classes as per university policy. Therefore, they were in right position to share their opinions related to e-learning.

Convergent Design (One-Phase Design)



Phase 1

Figure 2. Design of the current study

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Findings

After the responses were received, data were analyzed to examine the extent to which e-learning tools were used by English language learners. The findings were also illustrated through graphic representation. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to interpret students’ use of e-learning tools. Pallant (2020) stated that descriptive analysis referred to statistical description, aggregation, and presentation of the constructs. According to Woodrow (2014), “descriptive statistics are important in a research study because they form the basis for further analyses and enable a reader of the research to replicate the study” (p. 50). It offers an overview of the findings and the graphical presentation complements it. It displays the numerical data or facts either in graph or in

tabular form. This study used a bar graph to discuss the numeric data for students' use of e-learning tools. The data was collected using a questionnaire that yield a quantitative outcome based on descriptive non-parametric data. Under Descriptive analysis, this study used frequencies to explain learners' use of e-learning tools. The findings were presented in bar graph (see figure below) that showed the raw data frequency and the percentage for each tool used by English language learners.

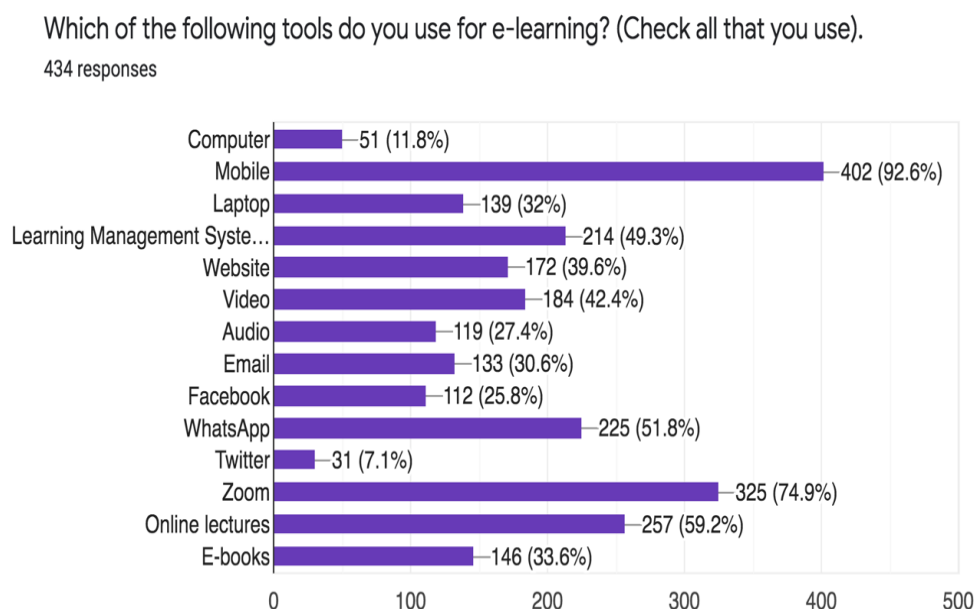


Figure 3. Survey Results for Students' Use of E-learning

The bar graph (figure 1) shows the descriptive statistics regarding students' use of e-learning tools. Mobile seemed to be the most popular e-learning tool among English language learners with the maximum percentage of responses (92.6%) followed by Zoom application (74.9%), online lectures (59.2%) and WhatsApp communication (51.8%). The use of Learning Management System was also reported by majority of students (49.3%) that was followed by the use of videos (42.4%), websites (39.6%), e-books (33.6%) and e-mail with 30.6%. The most important reasons why English language learners made use of these tools more than others that during the data collection, they were using e-learning to its full extent due to COVID-19 pandemic therefore they were relying heavily on online classes using Zoom application. However, computer and Twitter were the least used e-learning tools as only a few participants with 11.8% and 7.11 respectively reported to use them.

Qualitative Findings

This section reports major findings of semi-structured interviews for the research question that was structured to investigate students' use of e-learning tools that included computer, website, Facebook online lectures, mobile, videos, WhatsApp, e-books, laptop, audios, twitter, LMS, email and Zoom app particularly during COVID-19.

Using e-learning tools within English language learning requires some technical skills and certain degree of confidence. Almost all the participants expressed positive views regarding the use of e-learning tools and none of the learners shared a strong negative view for that. When asked about the e-learning tools they use, named different tools which they integrate in their learning English language. They talked about three different categories of the e-learning tools which they use in their learning (a) online

learning tools (b) offline learning tools (c) hardware tools. They also talked about perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness when using e-learning tools.

Online Learning Tools

Among the social media communication tools, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular tools among the learners for learning English particularly in the era of the COVID-19. One of the participants (M3) said, “we use different e-learning tools inside and outside the classroom such as Google classroom, email, and the most common tool we use for communication is social media mostly Facebook and WhatsApp” (M3). Another participant (M4) added, “I use Facebook and WhatsApp for communication with my fellows but I mostly use email if I need to send my assignment to my teacher”.

Almost all of the participants stated that their use of e-learning tools such as e-books, internet, online websites, online videos, etc. It enhanced their English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Their use of e-learning tools had also contributed to the increase in their English vocabulary. Following are the statements extracted from their interviews.

We attend online lectures on English language learning from some prestigious universities of the world... We also use YouTube videos to improve our listening skills and Pdf books to improve our reading skills. (M1)

Another participant (F8) added, “even before COVID-19, it was mandatory for every teacher or CR (Class representative) to create groups for each class mostly using three platforms Facebook, WhatsApp and e-mail for sharing learning material and other classroom related things”.

Learners, not only downloaded the course material uploaded by their teachers on email, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, but using these platforms they also shared lectures, ppts and other learning material with each other.

We use email if need to send any e-book to our fellows or if we need to send any assignment to our teacher then we also use email but when we need to send screen shots of the slides of teachers' lecture or any other photos or when we need to ask anything related to our classroom from our class fellows then we use WhatsApp or Facebook messenger. (M4)

Therefore, according to one of the participants, it was compulsory for all of them to create their e-mail, Facebook and WhatsApp Ids to have an access to the material.

Before entering to university, I did not have my email ID even but I had to create an email ID and had to use it regularly because our teachers send articles, e-book and other learning material mostly on our email Ids. (M6)

Offline Learning Tools

In addition, offline e-learning tools such as Word documents, PowerPoint, downloaded internet material were also popular among English language learners. The use of offline e-learning tools has been demonstrated by the following quotations.

I download e-books from internet and read them in free time to get information for the particular topic assigned to me by teacher, I also- download PPT slides available on the internet because these slides provide accurate and to the point information then after gathering points from multiple sources, I type using MS Word to create comprehensive essay. (F8)

Hardware Tools

Expressing his views on the integration of e-learning hardware tools (such as computers, laptops, mobile phones, ipads, etc.) to serve their academic needs, M4 stated, "I love to learn in e-learning environment rather sometimes I think that I would never have survived academically if there were no laptop which I use most of the times". Consistent to this response, M3 responded,

I am quite addicted to the use of mobile phone so I use mobile for my learning purpose too. I do all kind of classroom related tasks using my mobile. Like I use email, Facebook, WhatsApp, even I read e-book on the mobile screen and sometimes I type using Word option in my mobile and send it to my teacher. (M3)

The responses above indicate learners' positive views towards the use of e-learning tools as they point out the fact that these e-learning tools are easy to use, helpful for not only productive learning but also for effective interaction with others.

Discussing about their preferable way of submitting assignment majority of the learners preferred to submit their electronic version of their assignments, for example, "I would definitely prefer electronic version because it is very much feasible for me to go to my computer and send it even by eleventh hour" (M1). Another participant (F2) also stated the similar point of view, "I would like to submit my assignment in electronic format because this way our marks will not be deducted based on our handwriting". Expressing the happy state when asked to submit an electronic version, participant F5 stated, "I feel happy when teacher asks us to submit the electronic version of assignment". Moreover, participant F8 claimed, "I feel more comfortable in typing and then submitting the same assignment in electronic format" (F8).

Majority of the learners in this study felt that e-learning provided many opportunities to make the learning effective one by using various e-learning tools. While responding the question whether or not they preferred to read printed or e-book, participant M1 mentioned, "I would like to read e-books particularly in PDF format because it has many options of highlighting the text, adding note on it, etc.". Similarly, participant M4 expressed,

I would prefer reading e-book because I feel more comfortable to read e- book on my mobile and laptop screen. I don't feel to have any burden of carrying a book with me. I just go anywhere and finding some free time, I take my mobile and start reading a book to improve my reading skills. (M4)

He expressed his "comfort" level with e-book rather than printed book that leads him towards having positive attitudes for learning English language. In the same line, F7 viewed, "As I am very much addicted to the digital gadgets like laptop and mobile phone, so I would prefer to read e-book rather than printed book. This way I feel more comfortable". Many participants of this study perceive e-learning as the source to connect to the developed educational digital world as reported by M3, "if we want to progress in the field of education and specifically in the field of English language then e-learning is the way to connect with the world".

Perceived ease of use and Perceived Usefulness

According to TAM, learners' perceived ease of use and usefulness of e-learning were the strong determinants of e-learning (Choudhury & Pattnaik, 2020; Yang & Kwok, 2017). It was evident from the learners' responses throughout the interviews that all

learners strongly believed in “usefulness” and “ease of use” while using e-learning for learning English. This clearly led them to have positive inclination and their preference for using e-learning tools. One of the students expressed his opinion related to the ease of use in e-learning:

I believe we can learn English language in a better way only when we use e-learning because we can practice language skills only by using e-learning tools such as videos and audios to improve our listening skills. Again, there are hundreds of e- books are available which may prove beneficial for improving reading skills. (M1)

“Usefulness of e-learning” as perceived by learners was another important aspect of e-learning. The response of participant M4 shows that they are quite aware of the usefulness of e-learning when he says that “I think e-learning has a positive impact on our English language learning process rather it enhances our ways of learning and consequently we become able to give good results”.

Discussion

This question was addressed by quantitative and qualitative methods. Research carried out in the field of second language learning revealed that there is a large set of technologies available to the learners for improving second or foreign language learning of all four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) (Skorczyńska, et al., 2016). The quantitative results revealed the descriptive information of learners’ use of e-learning tools in the process of English language learning. The results reported that mobile has the major use in English language learning as it was ranked at the top among all e-learning tools. The use of mobile phone is enormously increasing among students using novel educational tools and activities (Trabelsi, 2021). These findings are consistent with Al-Emran and Salloum (2017) who found their participants’ use of mobile phones to the greater extent for learning purpose. The second most commonly used e-learning tool, as reported by the respondents of the current study, was Zoom application. It might be due to its effective use particularly in the era of COVID-19. As discussed in the literature review, these results are similar to Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) who found strong positive relationship between students’ actual use of Zoom application and their perceptions and behavioral intention towards it.

The e-learning tool that was ranked by participants at number three was WhatsApp. These finding are in line with Widodo (2019) who explained positive perception of English language learners towards usefulness and ease of use of WhatsApp. On the contrary, some of the participants also expressed that WhatsApp is used more for personal and social purposes more than the academic purposes. Similar problem was discussed by Manzira (2021) too since they found their respondents were using WhatsApp more for social purpose such as for chat and conversation rather than for learning. In parallel to the above finding regarding the use of e-learning tools, Nikolopoulou (2018) investigated students’ views on the use of e-learning technology and the findings showed that most of his participants did not find e-learning technology as a barrier to their creativity rather it helped them to use their creative skills effectively. “E-learning tools mainly support online teaching, resource sharing, recordings, online editing, resource management, online quizzes/exams, Q&A forum, online interactive platform, statistical report of course/ programs, etc.” (HEC, 2019, p. 5)

Consistent with these results, the participants of this study expressed in the interviews that e-learning tools are the important pillars of a modern education that offers a wide range of multi-dimensional technology ranging from simple to highly interactive

ones used in formal and informal learning contexts. The diverse variety of e-learning tools such as mobile phones, tablets and personal computers help students to exchange knowledge and to get access of the English language learning material through synchronous and asynchronous models. According to Malik (2010), it is better to blend the synchronous and asynchronous technological tools to balance the conflicting elements of time, space and interactivity. The findings also indicated that e-learning tools proved usefulness in their learning of English language as they extend their communication beyond the university and help them to develop their language skills and making their language learning process easier. This leads to their positive perceptions towards using e-learning tools. Similar results are produced in the previous studies (Grimus, 2020) who identified the use of diverse e-learning tools as one of the major advantages of e-learning.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to investigate English language learners' use of e-learning tools particularly during COVID-19 in Pakistan. It used mixed method approach to get an insightful understanding of their use of e-learning tools. The results of this study confirmed that mobile phone and Zoom application got the wider popularity used among other e-learning tools, The overall findings revealed that English language learners perceived e-learning tools easy to use and useful for their language learning process.

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