

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Empowering Rural Children through Technology: A Case Study on Spoken English Learning in Nearby Villages of Dayalbagh, Agra, India**

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Abstract:

Education is very important for people, communities, and countries to grow and move forward. In today's fast-changing world, it's even more crucial. Education helps you grow, learn things, and think smartly about life. In today's interconnected and technologically driven globalised world, proficiency in English language has become increasingly vital for individuals to thrive in various aspects of life. Being good at English opens up lots of opportunities in school, work, and social situations. But, while cities have good education, rural areas often face significant challenges in bridging the language gap. Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed to be University) situated in Dayalbagh, Agra, noticed this and started a free Medical and Rural Assistance camp to help nearby villages with education and healthcare. The goal is to make the community better overall. Among these activities, a special focus is placed on improving spoken English skills of rural children through technology. Therefore, the present research focuses on interactive tablet-based learning. The aim is to make the language acquisition process enjoyable and engaging for the children, thereby increasing their motivation to learn and participate actively.

Keywords: Spoken English, Education, Language, Technology

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the development and progress of individuals, societies, and nations. In today's rapidly evolving world, education holds even greater significance. It fosters personal growth and development and provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to move through various aspects of life. With this, one of the tasks of education is to hand on the cultural values and behaviour patterns of the society to its young and potential members (Ottaway, 1953). Education empowers individuals to make informed decisions, enhances their self-confidence, and improves their overall well-being. It would be generally agreed that the aim of education is full and balanced development of persons (Jeffreys, 1950). Language is especially an obvious means of communication (Mazari and Derraz, 2015). Any language is the primary means of communication in education. It allows teachers to convey information and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

instructions to students and enables students to express their thoughts, ideas, and questions. Language proficiency plays a crucial role in a student's comprehension and participation in the educational process.

In today's interconnected and technologically driven globalised world, proficiency in the English language has become increasingly vital for individuals to thrive in various aspects of life. English proficiency opens up a wide range of opportunities, providing individuals with a competitive edge in various academic, professional, and social contexts. It can be seen that today the role of English in the world is influenced by geographical, historical, cultural, and political factors. English is the language of media, journals, radio and television. It is also the language of institutions, courts and the language of huge industrial and commercial organisations (Balla, 2017). The speakers of English whose L1 is another language already vastly outnumber native English speakers, and their number continues to grow (Ur, 2012). It is the most international of languages (Ahmad, 2016).

However, while access to quality education and resources may be readily available to urban populations, rural communities often face significant challenges in bridging the language gap. Villagers often rely on agriculture and traditional occupations for their livelihoods. Economic opportunities are limited in rural areas, leading to lower incomes and a higher prevalence of poverty. Lack of access to financial services and markets further increases these challenges. Internet connectivity and access to information and communication technologies (ICT) can be limited in such areas. This can hinder economic growth, educational opportunities, and access to information that is essential for development. Thus, in many regions, rural children lack the necessary resources, infrastructure, and opportunities to develop and enhance their spoken English skills, leaving them at a disadvantage in terms of education and future prospects.

Scope of the Case Study

Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed to be University) situated in Dayalbagh, Agra, recognized this disparity and under its National Service Scheme (NSS) Programme initiated a free Medical-cum-Rural Assistance camp to address the educational and healthcare needs of nearby villages. This camp is organised every Sunday and the people and children from neighbouring rural communities including Bahadurpur, Khaspur, Nagla Talfi, and others come here. In these villages, access to healthcare services, including hospitals, clinics, and qualified medical professionals is limited resulting in inadequate healthcare facilities and a lack of essential medical services. Education facilities are also limited here, with fewer schools and resources which leads to lower literacy rates and limited educational opportunities for the villagers here. So, the camp aims to support the community in a well-rounded way. It provides vital medical services to the villagers while also offering recreational and educational activities for the children in the villages. The goal is to enhance the overall well-being and development of the community. Among these activities, a special focus is placed on improving spoken English skills through technology.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Technology has revolutionised education by providing new avenues for learning and breaking down geographical barriers. Learning has become more engaging and interactive by means of technology (Celik, 2023). In particular, technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) has been spotlighted due to its many advantages (Carr, et al., 2011; Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2013; Patel, 2014; Yang & Chen, 2007; Yeşilel, 2016). It has brought about numerous benefits to language learning, transforming the way we acquire and improve language skills. Interactive language learning software and applications engage learners actively by providing exercises, quizzes, and games that reinforce vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, and reading skills. It increases student engagement and motivation while facilitating communication and meaningful interactions in which technology-related tasks approximate more real-world contexts (Park, 2022). Through the integration of digital tools, language learning platforms, and interactive multimedia resources, rural children can engage with English language instruction in an immersive and interactive manner. Education, hand in hand with information and communication technologies (ICT), brings tools and innovative alternatives which improve students' daily lives (Larco, et al. 2021).

Objective

The case study presented in this research focuses on a specific rural community, where limited access to qualified English teachers, lack of language resources, and socio-economic constraints have hindered the development of spoken English skills among children. The study investigates the effectiveness of incorporating technology-based interventions to bridge the gap and empower these children to develop their language proficiency leading to improved educational outcomes, expanded career opportunities, and greater social mobility. By using technology and implementing innovative strategies, we explore how rural children can overcome barriers and access opportunities that would otherwise be beyond their reach.

Research Question

To achieve this objective the study sought to answer the following questions:

RQ 1 How does the incorporation of technology-based tools affect the language proficiency of rural children?

RQ 2 What are the challenges and barriers faced in implementing these tools to improve language proficiency among rural children?

Procedure**Instructional Procedures**

The research spanned six months (Oct 2022- March 2023) with one class every Sunday from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. Most of the children participants had a basic working knowledge of how to use devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Data Collection

Data was collected at regular intervals to track changes, patterns, and developments in children over time. The data collection methods employed in this study were observations,

RESEARCH ARTICLE

interviews, and group interactions. The researchers observed the children during their interactions at the Spoken English counter, noting their level of engagement, participation, and progress in spoken English skills. Individual interviews were also conducted with the children. Pre and Post Assessments were conducted to measure the children's proficiency in spoken English before and after their participation in the programme. This assessment included tasks such as introducing themselves, engaging in simple conversations, or responding to specific prompts.

Research Method

The study focused on a group of six children who regularly attended the camp and displayed remarkable progress in their ability to introduce themselves and engage in basic conversations in English. They learnt to greet the facilitators using appropriate expressions and confidently responded to inquiries about their well-being in English. The children's enthusiasm and willingness to converse in English demonstrated their growing confidence and motivation in learning the language.

Study Design

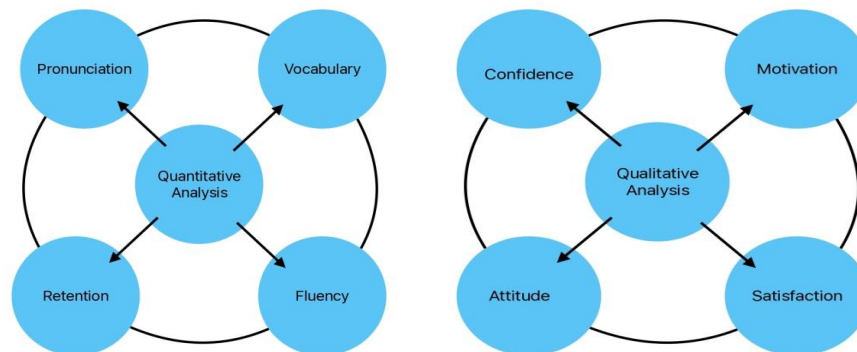
The present research followed a case study approach. It is a longitudinal study concentrating on the six selected children to do an in-depth examination over a period of six months. A mixed-methods approach was followed to allow for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the programme.

Sample

The participants in this study consist of the children of Bahadurpur, Khaspur, Nagla Talfi, Lal Garhi, and Madanpur, the nearby villages of Dayalbagh, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India. The study was conducted at the 'Free Medical cum Rural Assistance Camp', organised by the Dayalbagh Educational Institute's NSS Programme. These participants were children between the ages of 6 and 10, comprising boys and girls. Specifically, the research focused on a subset of six children who consistently visited the Spoken English counter at the camp and actively engaged in language learning activities.

Analysis and Interpretation**Data Analysis:**

The collected data was analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods such as observations and interviews. Pre and post-assessment scores and survey responses were analysed. This analysis helped in determining the overall improvement of the participants in Spoken English skills and their satisfaction with the programme. Fig. 1 shows the parameters taken for the quantitative and qualitative analyses:

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Figure:1 Parameters of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis**

(Authors' own compilation)

Interaction with the participants was done regularly. Face to face interviews were also conducted. After six months most of them were able to speak a few sentences in English. Some of them could speak with the help of the prompts given by the teachers. Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 show their conversation:

S1 - Good Morning Ma'am.**T - Good Morning. Why have you come to medical camp? Are you unwell?****S1 - Yes ma'am. I am suffering from a cold and cough.****T - Did you see the doctor?****S1 - Yes ma'am. He has given me a tablet and a cough syrup.****T - Good! Go home now and take medicine. Rest and get well soon.****S1 - Yes. Thank you Ma'am.****Figure 2 - Interview Script Sample 1 (Authors' own compilation)****S2 - Good Morning Ma'am.****T - Good Morning. How are you?****S2 - I am fine Ma'am. What about you?****T - I am good. Thank you. What is your name?****S2 - My name is ABC.****T - What is your father's name?****S2 - My father's name is XYZ.****T - Where do you live?****S2 - I live in Bahadurpur.****T - How old are you?****S2 - I am 7 years old.****Figure 3 - Interview Script Sample 2 (Authors' own compilation)****Interpretation:**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis are integrated to present a comprehensive understanding of the impact of technology on enhancing Spoken English skills in rural children.

After regularly participating in language learning activities for six months, the children improved in pronunciation and vocabulary. They also demonstrated increased participation and interest in the language learning activities. Remarkably, their ability to remember and apply what they learned was notable, indicating a positive impact on their learning retention. Moreover, the children's overall experience with the language learning activities was seen as good, reflecting a high level of satisfaction. Their motivation remained consistently high, promoting a positive attitude toward learning English. This heightened motivation and engagement contributed to a noticeable enhancement in their confidence when speaking English. Additionally, the children's increased comfort level in using the language proved the effectiveness of technology in facilitating Spoken English skills development in rural settings. Fig. 4 shows their perceived level of basic English speaking ability:

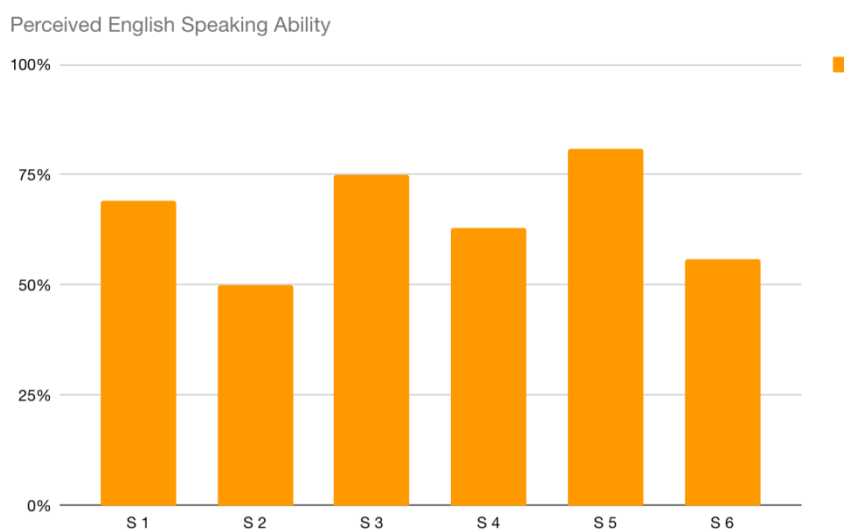


Figure 4: Perceived English Speaking Ability

This figure clearly indicates improvement in all the six students. While two children took more time to grasp the content, the others quite quickly learned what was taught.

Conclusion

This research study suggests that the use of apps, games, and software and the related activities and tasks were effective in engaging rural children in language learning. The use of Tablets has improved students' motivation to learn spoken English because they found learning through technology enjoyable.

Based on this experience, we strongly recommend the implementation of technology in language learning. It not only helps students engage in learning but also fosters learning

RESEARCH ARTICLE

motivation. The language skills of children can be enhanced through technology with the valuable guidance of teachers, facilitators, and mentors.

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