Application of Internet-Based Tools in Integrated English Language Skills Classes for Open/Online Distance Learning (ODL)

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ABSTRACT

The application of various approaches is an integral part of a teaching and learning session. Numerous tools and techniques are readily available to be integrated into the sessions to ensure that the outcomes desired can be successfully achieved. However, thorough consideration and preparation must be done when it comes to choosing and integrating suitable tools. Some of the aspects considered are the learning outcomes, the types and function of the tools, and the usability of the chosen tools, which include the materials and interaction tools. This paper presents the application of internet-based tools in the integrated English language skills classes using the open/online distance learning (ODL) medium. All the three stages of teaching and learning process namely the pre, while and post are included in this study.

1.0 Introduction

The development of education, in-line with the progress of time has required various shifts in the landscape of teaching and learning. Students are constantly changing in terms of age, background, and generation, necessitating the use of various approaches to meet their needs and learning preferences. This requires the instructors to further delve into the variety of teaching approaches and use multiple

platforms in ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning process is preserved hence achieving the main objective and purpose of education itself.

Among others, Education 4.0 which is a response to the needs of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) where humans and technology are aligned to enable new possibilities, highlights the flexibility of learning, where it can be done anytime and anywhere (Fisk, 2017). E-learning tools play such a major part in flexible learning as they offer great opportunities for activities involving it (Anealka A.H., 2018). As far as internet-based tools are concerned, some of the aspects worth-noting when it comes to the preparation of lessons which are digital literacy of the learners, the types, function, and usability of the chosen tools.

In general, the students who enroll in a tertiary education at present are the Generation Z (Gen-Z) kids ranging from 18 to 23 years old. This generation is revolutionized by technology, and well-engaged in flexible learning with minimal boundaries, which includes both the usage of related software or applications, as well as the devices in the process (Kozinski, 2017). They can use multiple platforms and technologies at the same time and quickly pick up new software. Information technology (IT) is a major part of their life, with no exception to learning. Therefore, the integration of internet-based tools either web or mobile apps-based is seen to fit the need in teaching and learning.

The tools readily available on the web or smartphone applications store can be categorized into different types and functions. As for the types, it can be generally divided into:

a) Web-based - accessed via Internet browsers
b) Mobile apps-based - accessed via applications for smartphone/tablet PC
c) Combination of both web and mobile apps-based

In general, the tools which offer handheld device applications can also be accessed via their web-based applications (e.g.: Google Classroom, Kahoot, Mentimeter), but not all web-based tools offer handheld device application (UFuture, iClass).

As for the function, the most comprehensive one is the learning management system (Google Classroom, OpenLearning, UFuture, iClass) which integrates all integral functions related to teaching and learning such as material sharing platform, discussion board, assignment or assessment management. Through these platforms, learners are able to upload and share their works to be checked and marked by the instructors.The assessment management functions in general also

integrate the auto-marking feature which allows the instructor to automatically generate the marks of the learners once the assessment is completed.

Other individualized functions range from communication (WhatsApp, Telegram), social media (Facebook, Instagram), media storage (Google Drive, Dropbox), media sharing (Padlet, Flipgrid), online quiz (Kahoot!, Quizizz), survey (Mentimeter, Google Form), screen recording, (ScreenRec, Screencastify), video conferencing (Google Meet, Zoom), and multimedia editing and designing (Canva, Powtoon, Prezi). The combination of these functions can assist both instructors and learners in elevating their teaching and learning experiences.

Usability is the other factor that also needs to be considered concerning the teaching and learning process. On one hand, good usability for online learning materials alludes to the site, content and media which are easy to be found, used and navigated. Whilst usability for the people signifies easy to be used and facilitated interaction tools (such as email and discussion forums) (Shank, 2009).

All the aspects mentioned above ranging from the learning outcomes of the lesson to the users' level of digital literacy are essential in ensuring a success in the teaching and learning process.

2.0 Objective

The objective of this paper is to present the application of internet-based tools in an integrated English language skills class for open/online distance learning (ODL).

2.1 Background

The subject for this particular paper is ELC151 students (Integrated Language Skills II), which is a compulsory English language subject for undergraduate students (diploma level) for numerous programs in the institution. As it is an integrated language skills course, the learning outcomes focus on the main language skills, namely reading, speaking, and listening, whereas grammar is taught incidentally in the teaching of the stated skills.

2.2 Learning outcomes

The general learning outcome for this lesson is to demonstrate the ability to listen and respond to various discourse at a higher intermediate level. The specific learning outcome is listening to details.

2.3 Pre-listening stage

The lesson started with a set induction for the learners to familiarise themselves with the activities and theme of the lesson. They were given a brief explanation about the lesson, including the kind of activities and the expected outcomes. The initial question given to the learners via WhatsApp group using voice notes was "Who do you think is the strongest/the best superhero in The Avengers?", and they were instructed to respond also by using voice notes. All of them participated in the activity, and they were sharing their personal opinion, agreeing as well as disagreeing with others regarding the issue.

2.4 While-listening stage

There were two parts to this stage, which involved similar activities. In the first part, the learners were instructed to watch and listen to a video on Facebook entitled Kids' Choice Awards - The Avengers. For the second part, the video was on YouTube, entitled Avengers Infinity Wars singing The Marvel Bunch. After a few minutes, they were instructed to complete a live online quiz on Quizizz, in which the link is given to them via Google Classroom. The types of questions were multiple-choice questions and fill in the blanks, which replicate the same type of questions for their assessment.

2.5 Post-listening stage

After completing the activities in the second stage, the learners were instructed to engage in a sharing session on the WhatsApp group about the challenges in the listening activity, their strategies in answering the questions, and suggestions for them to improve their listening skills. They were given options to use voice notes or text messages for this activity.

2.6 Assessment

The assessment was done using Google Forms with an auto marking function in the Google Classroom platform. The types of questions were filled in the blanks, which is the same as one of the question types for the activities done during the lesson.

3.0 Discussion

All in all, the application of internet-based tools presented in this paper combine the usage of various applications, which involve the consideration of the learning outcomes of the lesson, the various types and functions of the tools, as well as the aspect of usability. The applications used are of different types and functions, which were integrated into the complete lesson to achieve the desired learning outcome which is listening to details. The applications used such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom are among the top apps and widely used which lead to the familiarity of their usage among the learners, who belong to the generation coined as true digital natives who do not have a problem in flitting between platforms. The combination and usage of applications are dynamic as the learning outcomes and learners' acceptance need to be considered.

The best part of integrating ODL with the various internet-based tools and applications is it does not only benefit the learners, but the instructors as well by making the teaching and learning process easier. The idea of having more choices in integrating different types of applications in various learning stages helps the instructors to grab the students' interest. The instructors can always choose the most suitable applications that suit students' needs and at the same time focus on achieving the lessons' objective. Teaching listening skill, for example, requires a lot of activities involving listening. The ability to listen to the various authentic materials helps in the process of lesson delivery. Incorporating various platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, opens the door for the learners and instructors to obtain a lot of authentic materials, be it from the native or nonnative speakers of English. On the other hand, WhatsApp and Google Classroom serve as mediums of communication that are easily available and free to be used by both the instructors and students. In terms of assessments, Quizizz and Google Form provide a different experience of completing a quiz or a test for the students while at the same time helping instructors to reduce their marking load through the usage of auto-marking features.

The learners also have the opportunity to study at their own pace anytime and anywhere. The idea of using platforms that students are familiar with definitely has made the activity more interesting and engaging to them. The learners seem to be more comfortable using the platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp as they are using them for other personal purposes almost every day.

Whichever way internet-based tools are utilized, if their usage can assist the success of the teaching and learning process hence achieving the desired objectives, there

should be no boundaries for creativity among the instructors for they could make full use of all the mentioned tools.

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