STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE UTILIZATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN PRAGMATICS LEARNING

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper was to further investigate the previous theory of a positive correlation between educational technology and English pragmatics learning using the data sample of IIUM students. Two research questions which concerns the correlation between educational technology and English pragmatics learning were posed. The methodology used was qualitative with digital questionnaire distributed among 30 random students of IIUM. The data analysis resulted in two findings which reaffirmed the theory of past research regarding the positive correlation between educational technology and English pragmatics learning. Recommendations include gradual upgrading of tutors' technological knowledge as well of learning tools within the classrooms.

Keywords: Educational technology, pragmatics learning

Introduction

Within this present day and age, technology has been so deeply integrated within our lives that we tend to turn to it for every matter, including matters of language education. Technology signifies "organization of knowledge for the achievement of practical purposes as well as any tool or technique of doing or making, by which capability is extended" (Luppicini, 2005, p. 104) and is seen as a designated set of activities that would assist a human in adapting, participating and utilizing the environment (Braham, 1977 as cited in Luppicini, 2005). As technological devices have become easier and cheaper to access, most students would acquire and search for language information using technological devices.

Parallel to the advancement of time, manmade technology has also moved forward. Integration of technology has continuously occurred within every other aspects of our life, for instance, education. Utilization of technology within the education field is not a foreign concept as their correlativity was first made known through Sidney Pressey in the 1920s, who had the honor of inventing a teaching machine (Czerkawski & Lieberman, 2013). Throughout the years following the said discovery, various scholars took the chance to further investigate whether technology could be integrated into the fields of language learning. Motteram (2013) in his work mentioned how technology has now taken the center stage in language learning classes all over the world due to its diversity of functions as well as adaptability. In another study, Bhatti (2013) did a comparison between two situations; a classroom void of technological aid versus a classroom equipped with relevant electronic language learning tools. The results show that both tutors and students reacted positively towards integration of technology into language learning classes.

Pragmatics is one of the components which a student needs to consider when speaking in a second or foreign language. Pragmatics is a branch of language learning that deals with picking suitable wordings to communicate within a variation of sociocultural contexts (Liu, 2007). A study done by Sykes (2005) has shown a positive relationship between technologically-based teaching mediums such as the Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC) and pragmatics learning.

Noytim (2010) has experimented with the technological innovation of Weblogs and explored a group of university students' perception of it. The findings

reveal that the distinct functions of the Weblogs, like the posts made available to be viewed all over the world and the constructive comments typed back by people who possess more information, have allowed students to pick up how to appropriately use the language they are learning.

Similar findings could also be found in the research done by Wang, Calandra, Hibbard and McDowell-Lefaiver (2012). Albeit with a slight difference in variable, these authors were also in agreement that technology do play a positive role in the language learning process. For this paper, a virtual reality software, another brainchild of timeless technology, was used to connect a virtual bridge between two sets of students from China and America. This 'shortened' distance between them facilitated the Chinese students in learning how to properly use English when interacting with their American counterpart.

Ishihara and Cohen (2010) saw how technology increasingly influence English pragmatics learning. They were made aware of the flexibility offered by online pragmatics learning where students were given the opportunity to see which type of exercises or tools that suit their preference, further enhancing their interest and knowledge regarding English pragmatics. Meanwhile, Yang and Chen (2014) reported that students had agreed that they received a greater exposure to various cultural settings or contexts when they go through a technology-enhanced intercultural language learning (TEILI). A group of Taiwanese students received excellent pragmatics learning when they used applications such as E-pal and get live practice on how to use certain English semantics for different cultural contexts around the world. A study has also been made in China that observed the changing scene of English pragmatics studies in said country. It was revealed that Chinese students do wish to be more attuned to English pragmatics and more than half of the Chinese students in the study preferred to learn pragmatics theories through viewing English films and videos compared to traditional classroom teaching (Yuan, Tangen, Mills & Lidstone, 2015).

Statement of Problem

Previous research have shown positive links between the utilization of technology and English pragmatics learning. However, Malay tertiary students' perceptions on the existence of a relationship between technological utilization and pragmatics learnings has yet to be explored.

Purpose of Study

It was the purpose of this study to investigate the perceptions of Malay tertiary students on the utilization of technology in their learning of English pragmatics.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Is technological integration perceived to be helping students to improve their English conversational rules?
2. Is technological integration perceived to be helping students to critically learn English pragmatics?
3. Should technological tools be used to teach English pragmatics?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this research were 30 randomly selected Malay tertiary students. They were students of various faculties and ranged from the first to final year students.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this research was adapted from Yuan (2012). An online questionnaire was created using the Google Forms application. The online questionnaire included used a Likert-scale ranging from point 1 until point 3; 1 showing disagreement, 2 for neutrality, and 3 for agreement. Help texts were also provided under a few of the items within the questionnaire in order to facilitate students who were unfamiliar with certain subject-specific terms as well as easing their answering process.

Data Collection Process

After a proof-reading, the questionnaire was spread across various inter-university channels, for example a Facebook group. The data collected was organized and analyzed using the Google Spreadsheet.

Findings

The aim of this research paper was to investigate the perceptions of Malay tertiary students' on utilizing technology for English pragmatics learnings.
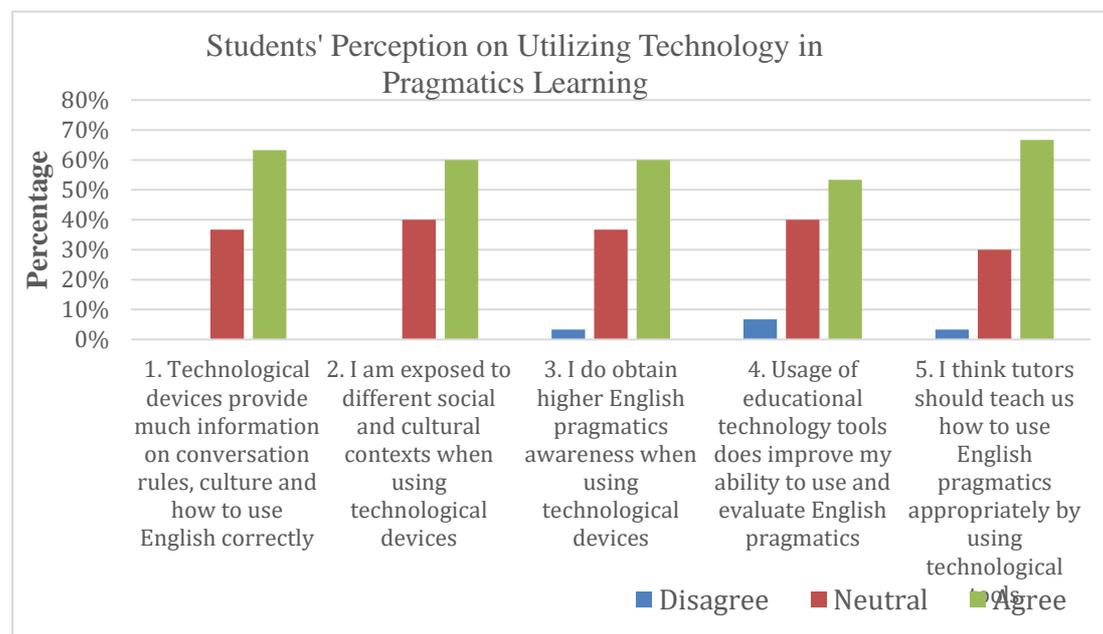
Figure 1: Students' perception of utilizing technology for English pragmatics learning

Based on Figure 1, the first research question is answered when slightly more than 63.3% agreed that technological devices would provide information on proper usage of English. A solid 60% agreed on being exposed to various social and cultural contexts when using technological devices.

To answer the second research question, 60% was in agreement that they had a higher pragmatics awareness when technology is involved in their learning processes. For the last research question, 66.7% of the respondents felt that lecturers should utilize technology to teach proper English pragmatics.

Discussion

The findings show that the use of technology was perceived to be helpful in providing students with exposure to various social and cultural contexts. This is consistent with the previous studies done such as by Ishihara and Cohen (2010) and Yang and Chen (2014)

It can therefore be speculated that the borderless connectivity feature of technological devices has allowed students to be aware of different types of contexts and to learn how to properly use English according to those contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research reveals that the use of technology in language classroom is perceived positively by Malay tertiary learners in helping them to learn English pragmatics. With technology gradually changing how we live our daily lives, mediums used to teach any subject matter are actually expected to change as well. Gradual changes should thus be made accordingly, starting with tutors having good trainings on how to teach using electronic devices. Classrooms should also be equipped with the latest technology so that language learners can easily observe and experiment on how certain English semantics are used in different contexts, either socially or culturally. This would help to further strengthen their English language pragmatics knowledge.

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