UTILIZING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS OF THE VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract
In the globalized era, proficiency in English is crucial for vocational school graduates to succeed in the workforce. Despite this necessity, many vocational students struggle with inadequate English skills due to limited access to quality materials, lack of motivation, and unengaging learning methods. This study aims to explore how digital technology can enhance English language learning among vocational students, making it more effective, interesting, and accessible. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with English teachers. The data was analyzed thematically to identify key trends and insights. The integration of digital technology, such as language learning apps (Duolingo, Babbel) and e-learning platforms (Google Classroom, Moodle), significantly improves English language skills among vocational students. Key benefits include increased access to learning materials, more engaging and interactive learning experiences, and enhanced motivation. Furthermore, digital tools facilitate personalized learning and provide immediate feedback, which helps students improve their language skills more efficiently. The study identified several challenges, including limited access to digital devices and the internet, and varying levels of technological proficiency among students and teachers. These challenges necessitate improved infrastructure and additional training to maximize the benefits of digital technology in education. Digital technology plays a pivotal role in transforming English language learning in vocational schools. Despite challenges, its benefits in improving language skills, increasing student engagement, and preparing students for the global workforce are substantial. Schools should continue investing in digital resources and training to ensure all students can leverage these tools effectively.

Keywords: Digital Technology; English Language Learning; Vocational Students; Interactive Learning; Educational Technology
1. **INTRODUCTION**

In the current era of globalization, the ability to speak English has become one of the essential skills vocational school graduates need to enter the world of work. These capabilities are required to communicate with colleagues or international clients and to access the latest information and resources in technology and industry. However, in reality, many vocational school students still have inadequate English language skills. This is caused by various factors, such as limited access to quality learning materials, lack of motivation to learn English, and less exciting learning methods (Journal et al., 2018).

Digital technology offers solutions to overcome these challenges. By utilizing digital technology, English language learning in vocational schools can become more effective, exciting, and accessible to all students. Here are some benefits of using digital technology to improve vocational school students’ English language skills:

- **Increase access to learning materials:** Students can access various English learning materials online, such as learning videos, interactive exercises, and news articles. This allows students to learn English whenever and wherever they want (Journal et al., 2018).

- **Digital technology can make English learning more exciting and interactive.** For example, teachers can use educational games, simulations, and English learning applications to make students more enthusiastic about learning. Increase learning motivation: Digital technology can help increase students’ motivation by providing a more personalized and enjoyable learning experience (Studies, 2014). Students can learn English at their own pace and choose learning materials that suit their interests. Makes communication easier: Digital technology allows students to communicate with native English speakers directly. This can help students to improve their speaking and listening skills. Improve access to information: Students can access the latest information and resources in technology and industry with good English skills. This can help them to improve their skills and knowledge (Ahmad, 2012).

The Indonesian government has committed to improving the quality of English language education in vocational schools. One of the efforts was to launch the English for Vocational Education (EVE) program. This program aims to improve the English language skills of vocational school students through various training and development programs. Utilizing digital technology is an important strategy to achieve the goals of the EVE program (Irawati, 2015). Using digital technology, English language learning in vocational schools can become more effective, exciting, and accessible to all students. This is expected to help improve the quality of vocational school graduates and prepare them to enter the global world of work (Arifi, 2017).

Technology is essential in educational transformation in an increasingly advanced digital era, including improving vocational students’ English skills. Digital technology provides various learning tools and platforms that students can easily access. Language learning apps like Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, and Babbel offer interactive and fun learning experiences. Additionally, e-learning platforms such as Coursera and edX provide English courses from renowned universities and institutions, allowing vocational students to learn from experts in their fields (Kanoksilapatham, 2022).

Using digital technology to learn English provides convenience and accessibility that traditional learning methods lack. Students can study anytime and anywhere, adapting their schedules to their daily needs and activities. Video tutorials, podcasts, and digital reading materials enrich the learning experience and enable students to improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English. In addition, digital technology also allows personalization of learning, where students can learn according to their level of proficiency and get fast and precise feedback (Yolanda et al., 2020).

Digital technology also opens up opportunities for global collaboration and communication. Through social media, online forums, and collaboration platforms such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams, vocational students can interact with native English speakers and students from various parts of the world. This improves their language skills and broadens their cultural horizons and global understanding. Thus, utilizing digital technology improves vocational students'
English skills and prepares them to participate in an increasingly connected global community.

The use of digital technology to improve vocational students’ English skills significantly impacts various aspects of learning. First, digital technology increases the accessibility and flexibility of learning. Vocational students often have busy schedules with practicals and fieldwork and can use language-learning apps and e-learning platforms to study anytime and anywhere. This allows them to adjust their study time to their daily activities, making the learning process more efficient and effective (Agustin & Ayu, 2021).

Second, digital technology enriches students’ learning experiences through various interactive tools and media. Language learning applications that use gamification, interactive videos, and adaptive learning modules make learning more exciting and fun. This increases students’ learning motivation and helps them master language skills more quickly and in-depth. The immediate feedback provided by digital technology also allows students to recognize and correct their mistakes, making the learning process more effective.

Third, using digital technology opens up opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration and communication. Through social media, online discussion forums, and collaborative learning platforms, vocational students can interact with native English speakers and students from various countries. This interaction not only improves communication skills in English but also broadens their cultural horizons and global understanding. This experience is invaluable for vocational students prepared to work in international or multinational environments, where cross-cultural communication skills are essential. Thus, the positive impact of digital technology on English language learning is extensive, including improving accessibility, learning quality, and students’ global communication skills. The following research questions guided the study: (1) How effective is the use of digital technology in improving the English language skills of vocational students? and (2) How can digital technology help overcome English learning challenges in vocational schools?

2. Method

2.1. Data Collection

2.1.1. Observations: Observations will be conducted to see how students and teachers use digital technology in English learning activities. These observations will provide rich and in-depth contextual data regarding interactions between students, teachers, and technology

2.1.2. Teacher interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with English language teachers to explore their integration of technology in the classroom. The interview guide will focus on their strategies, challenges, and perceived benefits of using technology for teaching English

2.2. Data Analysis

To obtain a general overview of the findings of this research, the collected data were analyzed through the following steps:

1. Defining the research problem.
2. Identifying the required data type
3. Establishing data collection procedures.
   The researchers decided to conduct observations and interviews with English language teachers.
4. After collecting the data, the researcher determines which data should be used and which should not.
5. Researchers will summarize the findings of the descriptive study by addressing the research questions and integrating all responses into a single conclusion that summarizes the entire research problem.

2.3. Research Design

This research design focuses on a specific context, such as a vocational school or program, and uses in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations to gather insights into the use of digital technology in English language learning. The researcher employs thematic analysis to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes in the data. Ethical considerations include informed consent and maintaining confidentiality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observations of the use of digital technology in English language learning in vocational schools show that online learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Moodle are very helpful
in organizing course materials and assignments. Students can easily access materials, submit assignments and participate in online discussions. This increases students’ engagement in learning and makes it easier for teachers to monitor students’ learning progress. In addition, communication between teachers and students becomes more efficient and structured.

The use of language learning apps such as Duolingo and Memrise gives students the opportunity to learn independently and interactively. These apps provide adaptive exercises according to students’ abilities, thus helping them to improve their vocabulary and grammar. Students who diligently use these apps show significant improvement in their English language skills, as seen in their test results and ability to communicate in class. The app also makes learning more interesting and motivates students to study harder.

However, some challenges are still faced in the use of digital technology, such as limited access to devices and the internet for some students. In addition, there are also differences in comfort levels and technological skills between students and teachers, which sometimes hinder the learning process. Schools need to provide adequate facilities and additional training to ensure all students and teachers can utilize digital technology effectively. Nonetheless, overall, the integration of digital technology in English language learning at SMK has had a positive impact on students' language skills and learning motivation.

Based on the interviews conducted with three teachers regarding the use of digital technology in English learning in vocational schools, the following results were obtained:

How are digital technologies used in the English learning process at your school? Can you give a concrete example?

Teacher 1: Digital technology is used through learning apps such as Duolingo and Babbel, as well as e-learning platforms such as Google Classroom for lesson materials and assignments. Another example is the use of learning videos from YouTube and TED-Ed.

Teacher 2: Used through online platforms, language practice apps, and interactive software such as Duolingo and Google Classroom for assignment submission and discussion.

Teacher 3: Use of Google Classroom and Moodle for materials and assignments, and Duolingo and Babbel apps for independent practice. Learning videos from YouTube are also used to enrich the materials.

To what extent does the use of digital technology improve the English language skills of vocational students? What are the indicators of success that you observe?

Teacher 1: Digital technology improves English language skills with indicators such as improved test scores, active participation, and more confident speaking and writing.

Teacher 2: Indicators of success include improved test scores, classroom engagement, and better communication skills.

Teacher 3: Indicators of success include improved test scores, student engagement in class, and the ability to complete technology-based tasks.

What is the biggest change you have seen in students since the use of digital technology in English language learning?

Teacher 1: Increased student motivation and engagement in learning, as well as independence in learning.

Teacher 2: Increased students' confidence in using English.

Teacher 3: Increased confidence and independence in learning.

How does digital technology affect students’ speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in English?

Teacher 1: Improvement in all aspects of language skills with the help of interactive apps and learning videos.

Teacher 2: Videos and podcasts for listening, discussion forums for writing, and AI apps for speaking practice.

Teacher 3: Apps for speaking practice, podcasts for listening, e-books for reading, and platforms like Grammarly for writing.

What are the main challenges faced in learning English in vocational schools?
Teacher 1: Limited access to quality resources, lack of motivation, and limited technological devices at home.

Teacher 2: Limited access to the internet, adequate devices, and different levels of technological proficiency.

Teacher 3: Limited access to internet and digital devices, and adaptation of technology by teachers and students.

Does digital technology help make English learning more interesting for students? How is it done?

Teacher 1: Making learning more engaging with gamification, videos, podcasts and immediate feedback.

Teacher 2: More interactive with educational games and AR apps.

Teacher 3: Interactive apps and platforms, gamification, videos and podcasts for variety.

Do you see an increase in students' motivation to learn English with digital technology? Can you explain further?

Teacher 1: Increased motivation due to interactive and fun learning, and flexibility of study time.

Teacher 2: Significant improvement due to flexibility, customization to individual needs, and technology engagement.

Teacher 3: Motivation increases with appropriate learning style, flexibility of learning time, and interaction with native speakers.

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience or thoughts regarding the use of digital technology to improve vocational students' English language skills?

Teacher 1: Digital technology is the future of education, improving the effectiveness of learning and preparing for a digitalized world of work.

Teacher 2: Technology integration is important for effective and relevant learning and preparation for the challenges of the world of work.

Teacher 3: Digital technology improves language skills and prepares students for the world of work and supports educational inclusiveness.

The results of these interviews indicate that the use of digital technology in English language learning at SMKs has a significant positive impact in improving language skills, motivation and student engagement, despite challenges in technology access and adaptation.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the observations and interviews illustrate a comprehensive picture of how digital technology is utilized to enhance English language learning in vocational schools (SMKs) and its effectiveness in addressing the challenges associated with English education in these institutions.

Utilization of Digital Technology

The integration of online learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Moodle has proven to be instrumental in organizing course materials and assignments. These platforms provide students with easy access to materials, facilitate assignment submission, and foster active participation in online discussions. This organization and accessibility significantly enhance student engagement and simplify the monitoring of students' learning progress for teachers. Additionally, these platforms streamline communication between teachers and students, making it more efficient and structured (Journal et al., 2018). Language learning apps like Duolingo and Memrise offer students opportunities for independent and interactive learning. These apps present adaptive exercises tailored to students' abilities, which aid in improving their vocabulary and grammar. The interviews with teachers reveal that students who consistently use these apps demonstrate notable improvements in their English language skills, as evidenced by their test results and increased ability to communicate in class. The engaging nature of these apps also serves to motivate students to study more diligently (Journal et al., 2018).

Impact on Language Skills

The use of digital technology has positively influenced all aspects of language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Interactive apps and learning videos contribute to overall skill enhancement, while specific
tools such as podcasts and discussion forums target particular skills like listening and writing, respectively. Apps using AI for speaking practice and platforms like Grammarly for writing support provide immediate feedback, allowing students to correct mistakes and improve continuously. Teachers observed several indicators of success with the use of digital technology, including improved test scores, active participation in class, and increased confidence in speaking and writing. These indicators reflect not only an improvement in language skills but also a boost in students' motivation and engagement in learning (Agustin & Ayu, 2021).

Challenges and Solutions

Despite the positive outcomes, challenges persist, particularly concerning access to digital devices and the internet. Some students face difficulties due to the limited availability of technological resources at home, and there are disparities in technological skills and comfort levels between students and teachers. To address these challenges, schools need to ensure the provision of adequate facilities and offer additional training for both teachers and students to maximize the effective use of digital technology (Article, 2020).

Enhancing Engagement and Motivation

Digital technology has been identified as a crucial factor in making English learning more engaging and motivating for students. The use of gamification, interactive videos, and educational apps makes learning more interesting and enjoyable. The flexibility provided by digital platforms allows students to learn at their own pace and at times that suit their schedules, further increasing their motivation (Journal et al., 2018).

Overall Impact and Future Considerations

The overall impact of digital technology on English language learning in vocational schools has been overwhelmingly positive. The integration of digital tools has led to significant improvements in language skills, increased student motivation, and greater engagement in learning activities. Moreover, digital technology prepares students for the digitalized world of work, making them more competitive in the global job market (Hockly et al., 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

The use of digital technology in improving English language skills among vocational students is a significant challenge in today's globalized world. Many students lack adequate English language skills due to limited access to quality learning materials, lack of motivation, and less exciting learning methods. Digital technology offers solutions to overcome these challenges by making English language learning in vocational schools more effective, exciting and accessible. Benefits of using digital technology include increased access to learning materials, making learning more interesting, increasing motivation, making communication easier, and improving access to information. The Indonesian government has launched the English for Vocational Education (EVE) program to improve the quality of English language education in vocational schools through various training and development programs. Technology provides various learning tools and platforms, such as language learning apps like Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, Babbel, and e-learning platforms like Coursera and edX. It also opens up opportunities for global collaboration and communication through social media, online forums, and collaboration platforms like Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams. The positive impact of digital technology on English language learning is extensive, including improving accessibility, learning quality, and students' global communication skills. Schools need to provide adequate facilities and additional training to ensure effective use of digital technology.

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