USING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY TOOLS TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF ESL STUDENTS

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Abstract: The focus of this qualitative case study research project was to find out what educational technology tools international students at Eastern Michigan University use to improve their language and communication skills. More specifically, this study is based on this research question: "On their own, outside of the structure of ESL classes, to what degree do International students use technology to practice English language and communication skills?" The question let me to explore what technologies they use and how often and for what purposes. In this paper, 6 interviewee` answers and the results of their interviews are given to have better understanding of the research question. The results of this study suggest that students are using technological tools in their daily lives for many purposes, especially for their education. It is also seen that using educational technology tools will help both to the students and to the teachers to be more successful, efficient and practical people in their lives.

Keywords: Educational technology tools, language skills, communication skills, ESL students

Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı Eastern Michigan Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören uluslararası öğrencilerin dil ve iletişim becerilerini geliştirmek için ne tür eğitim teknolojisi araçlarını kullandıklarını saptamaktır. Daha ayrıntılı olarak, bu çalışma şu araştırma sorusu üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır: "Kendi kendilerine, ESL sınıflarının dışında, uluslararası öğrenciler İngilizce dil ve iletişim becerilerini geliştirmek için teknolojiyi hangi seviyede kullanıyorlar?" Araştırmada, araştırma sorusunun daha iyi algılanabilmesi için mülakat yapılan 6 öğrencinin sorulara verdikleri cevapları ve mülakat sonuçları verilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, öğrencilerin teknolojik ürünleri günlük hayatlarında değişik sebeplerle, ama özellikle eğitim amaçlı kullandıkları bulunmuştur. Bu araştırmada, araştırma sorusunun daha iyi algılanabilmesi için mülakat yapılan 6 öğrencinin sorulara verdikleri cevapları ve mülakat sonuçları verilmiştir. Ayrıca, eğitim teknolojisi araçlarının kullanımının hem öğrencilerin hem de öğretmenlerin günlük hayatlarında daha pratik, başarılı ve verimli kişiler olmalarına yardımcı olduğu saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Eğitim teknolojisi araçları, dil yeteneği, iletişim becerileri, ESL öğrencileri

I. Introduction

"All of the top achievers I know are life-long learners... looking for new skills, insights, and ideas. If they're not learning, they're not growing... not moving toward excellence."

(Denis Waitley)

United States culture was created through a blending of the many different people that live in the nation. Throughout American history, immigrants from all over the world have come to the United States, each contributing to U.S. culture. From 1820 to 1930, the United States received about 60% of the world's immigrants. Many people came to the USA for better education or better jobs. More than that of any other nation in the world, the population of the United States has increased through repeated waves of immigration. Immigration has given the United States a special character. Each wave is changing the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of its society (Tyack, 2003).

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Besides immigrants, there are many international students who come to the USA every year to have better education and better job opportunities. According to the statistics, there are 22,873 foreign students in Michigan by 2002/03 and 1214 of them having education at Eastern Michigan University (http://www.emich.edu/ois/visaissues/Stats_int'lexchange_MI.htm). However, living in another country and adjusting its culture and new life style are not easy to adjust for many people. Many students deal with a difficult stage which is called "cultural shock" (Schnell, 1996), when they come to the USA. Moreover, they also have language and communication problems, especially in speaking and writing, even though many of them have high TOEFL and GRE scores on their tests.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how international students' use technology to practice English language and communication skills outside of the structure of ESL classes. As an international student in the USA, I thought that it is important to study on this topic because this study is going to help to international students and ESL teachers who can learn more about technological educational tools and how these tools can be used for improving communication and writing skills which are speaking, writing, reading and listening. Moreover, if the future ESL students and teachers are more aware of these tools; students would have little problems in these skills and the teachers would help their students more efficiently.

This study based on this research question: "On their own, outside of the structure of ESL classes, to what degree do International students use technology to practice English language and communication skills?" The question would let me to explore what technologies they use and how often and for what purposes.

Assumptions and Limitations

While studying on this study, lack of time was the biggest problem. To make interviews with ESL students was hard because of their busy schedules. Moreover, it was also kind of hard to find interviewee because ESL students generally believe that their English is not enough to talk. So, I needed to explain them everything about the research over and over again and needed to ask may be more than 20 students to make an interview. After trying so hard, I could just find 6 students, however their answers helped me to find answer to my research question. Another problem was not being able to use observation method for data collection because of the topic. It was not possible to observe an interviewee without affecting him/her because he/she would know the reason why I was there, so it would affect their natural behaviors. Because of this reason individual interview method is chosen for data collection.

II. Review of Relevant Literature

This literature review is going to focus on research and reports compiled on 'Language problems of ESL students' and 'Technology in ESL classes'.

Language Problems of ESL Students

Learning a foreign language is a really hard task for everyone. To have an education in a foreign language is even harder. To be able to read, understand a language, speak it fluently and writing in it with no error takes a lot of time. ESL students, who live in another country and try to pass this hard experience, face these language and communication problems. There are many researches that aware of these problems and do researches on them. For example, it is a research study about exploring foreign students' lack of speaking and writing skills in English. The research which is titled "Dimensions of Difficulties Mainland Chinese Students Encounter in the United States" examined the difficulties Mainland Chinese students encountered in the process of adjusting to American culture (Sun & Chen, 1997). In this qualitative research a questionnaire containing 13 open-ended questions was used to collect information about 10 Mainland Chinese students who enrolled in a mid-size public university and their adjustment process for three months. End of the research, there were three dimensions of difficulties subjects: (1) lack of language proficiency, (2) a deficiency in cultural awareness and (3) academic achievements. So, the relevant conclusions from this study demonstrate that international students have problems related to culture shock and to language in spite of high TOEFL & GRE scores. And further studies, Sun and Chen would like to research on these three dimensions more deeply and try to find some solutions for them (1997). Another researcher, who studies on Chinese EFL students language problems, points out in his research about Chinese students language problems, especially in listening part. According to his findings, these students` listening problem occurs with the possible difference in discourse patterns between English and Chinese (Yang, 2007). Besides difficulty in listening skill, as Alderson points out L2 (second or foreign language) students have more problems in reading skill than L1 students. L2 reading could be somewhat slower and less successful than L1 reading, because of the levels of readers' proficiency, types of text, text difficulty and task demands (2000). Moreover, Chikamatsu in his study point outs that some students might not have been skillful typists especially who use logo graphic languages such as Japanese and Chinese, which have input processes different from those of English and other Indo-European languages, computer use by second language learners is relatively uncommon and its impact on writing is uncertain (2003).

Another research study which is titled "Culture Shock in the Basic Communication Course: A Case Study of Malaysian Students" examined foreign students from one cultural background, Malaysia, in the American basic speech class to discover which areas they find most difficult and to discover those norms and values that cause these difficulties (Yook, 1995). Malaysian students were chosen as the focus of the study because Asian students comprise more than half of the total foreign student population (56%), and Malaysians constitute one of the largest groups among the Asian student groups. Qualitative- Ethnography was chosen as the study's principal approach to answer the research question: "What are the most prominent areas of difficulty for the Malaysian student in the American speech class, and what are underlying causes of these difficulties?" A total of 11 interviews were carried out with 2 major groups--Malays and Chinese Malaysians and 3 instructors who currently had Malaysian students enrolled in their classes were completed. According to the research Malaysians have at least three main handicaps in a speech class: (1) they have a language barrier; (2) they come from a culture in which gesturing and speaking loudly are frowned upon; and (3) they have had no experience in their own countries speaking publicly. Also, reasons of difficulties with eye contact for female students are

discussed. Interviews also led to suggestions about how to help Malaysian students in speech classes. For example, schools could offer remedial classes in English; instructors could coach students individually, and take their disadvantages into account when evaluating them.

In addition to the Malaysian and Chinese students problems, there is a quantitative research which is titled "Adjustment Issues of Turkish College Students Studying in the United States" by Poyrazli (2001), tries to find answers these research questions: (1) What are the relations between demographic variables and the adjustment level of Turkish college students in the U.S.? and (2) What is the internal reliability and the relation between the ISAS and its subscales? 79 Turkish undergraduate and graduate students in the United States participated in the study. Two instruments were used in the study to collect data: the Demographic Questionnaire which is about several variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status, years spent in the United States, and English language proficiency level and the Inventory of Student Adjustment Strain which helps to measure the stresses and adjustment strains that are experienced by. The results of the research showed that the students who had better writing-reading proficiency in English, also reported having less adjustment issues. Usually, the primary goal of the students is to finish their education successfully. Being academically successful, however, usually requires good writing and reading skills. The students who possess poor writing and reading skills may have a hard time dealing with their classes and this may lead to more stress and more adjustment problems. The older students may be having more adjustment problems because their values, customs, and interests may have been set and that they may have a hard time changing them (Poyrazli, 2001).

Technology in ESL Classes

In the 21st century, technology is everywhere. Especially the new generation is growing up with technology and gets familiar with it. Computer technologies have dramatically changed the way people reach information, do research and communicate with people all around the world. Because of this reason, schools and teachers need to be aware of improving their technological tools and skills to be able to catch the students` attentions and interests. Using technology in classrooms also makes the lesson more efficient. There are many technology tools which can be used in the ESL classes to improve foreign students' both English and technology skills. According to Wang (2005) there are many advantages integrating technology in classrooms especially for EFL students. To be able to improve their language skills, like writing, reading, listening and speaking, English language learners use computers, software programs to check their work and correct themselves, improve their language skills; use Internet, e-mails to search information, join in threats, publish their work, read technology texts, communicate each other even worldwide. He also says that, "Technology integration in foreign language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigms from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach" (p. 2). Besides many advantages, there are some disadvantages of technology integration in schools, like the tremendous start up expenses, copyright issues, objectionable materials and other potential disadvantages of technology, much research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of, and better strategies for, technology integration (Wang, 2005). For instance, LeLoup and Ponterio (2000) also explain some technology tools which can be used in foreign and ESL classes in their article: electronic mail (e-mail), electronic lists (LISTSERVs), electronic journals, world wide web, streaming audio and video, search engines, remote access to libraries and databases, chat, audio and video conferencing, messaging, web course management

software are some of the educational technology tools. In their article, they talked about applying these tools in foreign language and ESL classrooms would help especially to improve language teachers' technological skills (LeLoup & Ponterio, 2000). In addition to LeLoup and Ponterio`s explanations and examples, Xiaoqiong and Xianxing in their research use a film as an effective medium for teaching English language skills and how we motivate our students to learn English by means of film in EFL contexts. They found out that by watching and listening to engrossing materials, students are greatly motivated to learn English. Also, they point out that this method improves students' listening comprehension and pronunciation skills, and they have learned that it is nearly fruitless to teach listening skills using auditory material alone. Besides DVD player and speakers, they also used computer and the Internet to download some pictures and some information about the movie (2008). It is very clear that using technological tools gets attention of students and motivates them easily.

Also, Soska (1994) explains educational technology and its tools such as CD-ROM discs, Interactive audio, interactive videodisc, local area networks, hypermedia and telecommunications in his article on educational technology methods (p.3). In his paper, Soska points out that educational technology can help ESL learners develop speaking, reading, and writing skills. Databases and spreadsheets can furnish direct experience in organizing and retrieving information, as well as develop problem-solving skills. Also, Word processors, including some that are bilingual, are an excellent way to further writing development and motivate students to write (Soska, 1994).

Not be able to speak fluently in English is one of the biggest problems of the foreign students in the USA, especially for the Asian students who do not use the same letters and voices. Even though they have very high GMAT, GRE or TOEFL scores on grammar, reading or writing, their real problem is speaking part. Because of this problem there are many researches interested in studying on this topic. They try to find some solutions and help these students. "Proposing an interactive speaking improvement system for EFL learners" titled research proposes a web-based interactive speaking improvement system for EFL learners. Using fuzzy matching, the system automatically compares the learner's and the system's pronunciation and immediately provides corrective interaction whereby the student can improve speaking via continuous imitation and practice at the computer. The system was tested on 158 Taiwanese students who needed to achieve a speaking proficiency equivalent to CEF Level A2. In the research, the user can access this web-based system through the Internet and select a conversation mode on the computer. The computer on the user site must have a microphone and loudspeaker. Using this corrective system, the user can repeatedly practice speaking English by imitating its pronunciation. End of the research it is found that using this technological tool is highly effective for the intended purpose (Hsu, 2010). Another research (Chiu, Liou & Yeh, 2007) is also about how to improve speaking skills of EFL learners. There is a new computer-assisted language learning application called Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) for assisting learners to engage in meaningful speech interactions. According to Chiu et al., in their study, a web-based conversation environment called CandleTalk, which allows learners to seemingly talk with the computer, was developed to help EFL learners receive explicit speech acts training that leads to better oral competence. In the research, local cultural information incorporated as the content of the dialogues to enhance student motivation and the materials were put to use on 29 English major and 20 non-English major students in order to investigate their learning outcome and perception

in an EFL context. Oral proficiency assessment using the format of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) given before and after the use of CandleTalk and an evaluation questionnaire were two instruments used for data collection. The results of the study showed that the application of ASR was helpful for the college freshmen in the teaching of speech acts, particularly for the non-English major students (2007).

The Internet is a vast network linking computers all over the world. There are also currently many websites containing material for ESL learning accessible free of cost. Kung and Chuo (2002), in their quantitative research, which is titled "Students' perceptions of English learning through ESL/EFL websites ", intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in terms of the following research questions: (1) What strategies used by the teachers to facilitate learning through ESL websites do students find helpful? (2) Do students think it is appropriate to learn English through teacher-recommended ESL websites? (3) How likely is it that students will use ESL websites for further learning? (4) What problems and difficulties do students encounter when they use these teacher-selected websites? The participants, who were taking three required English courses: Conversation and writing, reading, and listening, were chosen from a class of 49 students majoring in French and minoring in English at a technological college of languages in Southern Taiwan. This project was implemented in the students' conversation and writing course, which aims to enable students to speak fluently on a variety of conversational topics as well as to write accurately in well-organized paragraphs. According to the research, the study evaluated a program aimed at familiarizing students with ESL resources on the World Wide Web and the students considered the Internet a useful tool to supplement in-class instruction. The students deemed it appropriate to learn English through teacher-recommended ESL websites. Spending too much time and getting disconnected were perceived as the main problems for the students to complete their assignment. Also, this research shows that students needed instruction by their teachers regarding where the sites are and in how to use them (Kung & Chuo, 2002).

Using technology, especially using Internet in the ESL classes helps students to improve their language skills. For instance, Ware (2004), in her qualitative research study addresses the variance in how three different ESL students participated in web-based discussion boards and chat rooms in their first-year university writing course. This research was guided by two overarching questions: (1) In what ways can computer-mediated social interaction contribute to or constrain the resources available to English language learners who are acquiring academic literacy? (2) How can an understanding of ESL students' perspectives of online social interaction contribute to the pedagogical choices educators make in the design of technology-enhanced writing courses? Participants, who were required to enroll in a 6-unit writing course because they had failed to pass the university writing requirement for entering students, were chosen from the author's own classroom of first-year writing students at a large public university in the western United States. Beginning of the research 14 students remained through the entire course, meeting in three-hour blocks twice a week for 15 weeks, a total of 90 contact hours. They were required to write weekly in the online, threaded discussion boards and to participate in three synchronous chat sessions during the semester. These real-time sessions took place at one of the university computer labs. After the sixth week of the semester, the author chose three focal students to explore in fuller detail the individual variance among students who, on the surface, could appear similar if grouped by institutional descriptors such as nationality. According to the research's results, individual students made choices in their web-based writing in ways that reflected their previous experiences with technology and writing, their views of themselves as students and

writers, and their relative comfort level with their peers in the classroom. However, their choices were also constrained by the pedagogical structure of the course, including the centrality of the instructor and the institutional directive for individualized assessment (Ware, 2004).

Another example of using Internet via chat rooms in an ESL setting shows us its effectiveness on students' language skill improvement. The mix (qualitative and quantitative) research titled "The Use of Chat Rooms in an ESL Setting" by Yuan (2003), explores the combination of on-line chat rooms with regular classroom interactions in a personalized English program and its potentials to enhance second language development. The research investigates: (1) two second language learners' self-repairs in their on-line chatting, (2) how such self-repairs help achieve the formal accuracy of their language production, and (3) what such self-repairs tell us about the learners' inter language development. Participants were chosen from the National University of Singapore's English Assist Programme which is a consulting service provided by the university to help non-native English-speaking teaching staff to improve their English during the first semester of the 1999–2000 academic year. Both staff members had had extensive experience in and exposure to English before the consultation started. The author helps them in both written and oral communications via chat rooms and face-to-face meetings. The research shows that the combination of traditional classroom meetings with chat room activities provided our language learners a varied learning environment. Learners not only received formal input in the traditional classroom (especially in terms of grammar), they also had an additional opportunity to use English as a tool to communicate meaningfully with someone on-line synchronously, in real time.

> "This additional channel and learning environment benefited the two advanced learners because the problem they faced was mainly practice. They may have known all the grammatical rules, but when it came to writing and speaking, they tended to forget the rules. In other words, their grammatical knowledge remained to be input. The opportunity to practice their English in the chat room helped refine their English, at least to a certain extent. They noticed the errors they made in their chats in a number of occasions and offered corrections or sought solutions from me, resulting in more target-like language production" (Yuan, 2003).

According researchers, ESL students experience cultural shock and language problems when they came to the USA like Malaysian, Chinese and Turkish students' (Yook, 1995; Sun & Chen, 1997; Poyrazli, 2001; Chikamatsu, 2003). Using educational technology tools in ESL classrooms such as ESL websites via Internet, web based discussions and chat room discussions help students to improve their language and communication skills. In other word, studies show that a supplementary on-line learning environment may enhance language learning and development (Kung & Chuo, 2002; Ware, 2004; Yuan, 2003; Hsu, 2010; Wang, 2005; Chiu et al., 2007; Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2008).

After reviewing the literature it is obvious that using educational technological tools and the Internet help students to improve their language and communication skills. In this research project, I am seeking to explore this question: "On their own, outside of the structure of ESL classes, to what degree do International students use technology to practice English language and communication skills?" The question would let me to explore what technologies they use and how often and for what purposes.

III. Procedure

Description of the Study

This research project is a qualitative, case study which explored the experiences of the international students at EMU and what kind of educational technology tools they were using to improve their language and communication skills. In this study qualitative research methods were used because for the purpose of the study, it seemed to be more appropriate and because of its ability to avoid pushing the subject into artificial categories.

Even though it is a non-participant study, I had the same experiences what international students have. As an international student, when I moved to the USA, I had culture shock. Trying to talk and understand in another language is the hardest part of the cultural shock. Even though, one can communicate with people after couple of months, but can still not explain the emotions perfectly. Because of my graduate program courses, I had a better understanding of benefits of using technology to improve my language skills. So, while researching this topic, I believe that my experiences will be advantage for me to explain and understand what stages international students have to pass while taking ESL courses and what kind of problems they have.

In this research individual interview method was used for data collection. The interviewee had been chosen on their level of computer skills and English levels from the Eastern Michigan University ESL classes. 3 ESL students participated at the beginning of the study. Then, I asked them who they thought I would interview with who had a very different perspective. Then, I have found 3 different names and made interviews with them, as well. After interviewing 6 ESL students, I realized that the answers are very similar and I did not hear any new ideas and no new people were suggested. The interviews took about 30 to 45 minutes and they occurred at a time and place that was convenient for the participant. The interviewee' pseudonyms and nationalities are: *Erdogan* who is a 28 years old (male) and Palestinian; *Ayse* who is a 26 years old (female) and Turkish; *Abdullah* is a 29 years old (male) and Palestinian; *Angie* who is a 23 years old (female) and Taiwanese; *Jenny* who is a 24 years old (female) and Taiwanese; *Yuni* who is a 24 years old (female) and Taiwanese. They were willing to make interviews with me and they answered the questions (see Appendix A) freely and fully. Even though there are some grammar errors in the transcriptions, it is written as they told. It was not made any changes.

End of the study, if the participants want to have a copy of the research outcomes, the research findings will be e-mailed to them by the researcher. With this way, they may learn more information about using educational technology tools to improve their language and communication skills by reading summary of the findings of the study.

Timeline:

The early stages of the research began October 15, 2005. The interviews were done with Ayse and Erdogan at November 15th 2005; with Abdullah at November 16th 2005; and with Yuni, Jenny and Angie at November 21st 2005. End of the 2005 fall semester because of lack of time, the research was transferred to the 2006 winter semester and the research concluded April 24, 2006.

IV. Outcome of the Study

This study sought to understand the experiences of the international students at EMU and what kind of educational technology tools they are using to improve their language and communication skills. According to research's data findings, international students are using some technology tools to improve their language and communication skills.

To be able to have better understanding of ESL students' experiences, 6 different interviews were made with 6 different interviewees. Besides Ayse who came to the USA because of her marriage, all of the interviewee came to the USA for getting their undergraduate and master's degree and all of them are taking ESL courses because of their low TOEFL scores. Some of them are living here just for couple of months, but some of them are living here for couple of years. All of them had English language education in their countries, but in a very low level like a beginning level. Even though they have different life and culture experiences before coming to the USA, they have very similar problems, challenges and experiences in the USA as international students.

All of the interviewee seemed like a little bit nervous at the beginning of the interviews, but after couple of general questions about their age, country, job, etc., they started to feel more comfortable and answered all questions perfectly. All of the interviews were completed with very friendly conversations because I have tried to make them more comfortable. For example, at the beginning of the conversations I asked them personal questions and according to their answers I made comments and we talked about their lives couple of minutes as friends. With each question, they started to talk more and more which made me comfortable, as well. It was like conversations with friends than an interview. When I felt that they were relaxed, comfortable and ready to answer I started to ask my interview questions. I believe that with this way they answered my questions honestly and fully.

After asking introduction questions, my first question was "In what skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) you think that you have problems most?", and their answers were very interesting and very similar. Ayse was not sure what to say: "Conversation and reading. Actually… I don't have too much problem with conversation….I can say reading and writing." This answer showed me that she actually was unsure and had some problems with every skill and when I said "So, can we say that you have problems a little bit from every skill?", she looked relaxed and answered me with laughter "Yes! I think I have problems with every skill!" Erdogan's answer was also interesting. After my question he said that he did not have any problem in English, but he admitted that he had some 'challenges'. When I changed the word and asked him the question again, he answered:

> All of them… I would say all of them because I believe that I didn't reach the level what I am looking for. I am in advance level in reading, writing, very advance level, but not perfect. That's why I am saying that all of them are challenging for me. I want to speak freely, express myself freely, without thinking to look for a meaning of a word or something like that. I still didn't reach that point. I want to read or write without stopping to go and look a word. I didn't reach that point yet. To reach that point, I am forcing myself to read, to write, to listen, to communicate with friends and I think that would be enough for this time.

Contrary to Ayse's and Erdogan's answers, Abdullah, Yuni, Jenny and Angie gave more specific answers. Abdullah said he had some problems in grammar; Yuni said she had problems in speaking and writing; Jenny said she had problems in vocabulary and grammar and Angie said her problems were in speaking and writing in academic projects.

After having similar answers I was sure that all of the ESL students have some problems in at least in one language skill. Then, to be able to understand if they use any technology while studying I have asked a broad question to make them talk: "To improve these skills what do you do besides studying from the books?" Erdogan and Abdullah said that they were reading in daily basis, especially some articles from the Newsweek Magazine because of their ESL reading class. Also, they both said that they were helping some American students who were learning Arabic. Moreover, they were both participating in clubs and organizations in the university, at EMU to interact with American people and to improve their English language and communication skills. Moreover, Erdogan added that he watched TV in daily basis and Abdullah listened radio stations from the Internet such as Michigan Radio Station, and also U of M, University of the Michigan Radio Station and read Ann Arbor News from the Internet. For the same question's answer, Yuni, Jenny and Angie said that they were generally watched TV with English subtitles and listened to the radio and talked to the friends in English and read newspapers and magazines. For communication skills, Angie added that she sometimes "goes to the church to speak with Native Americans."

Their answers were interesting and satisfactory. Interestingly, while they were answering the questions, I realized that Erdogan's and Abdullah's answers and Yuni, Jenny and Angie's answers were very similar. Also, I observed that the way they answered questions was very similar, too. For example, when I ask a question to Erdogan and Abdullah, it was very easy to talk with them because they gave the answers very quickly without asking them more questions about the same topic. On the other hand, it was kind of hard to interview with Yuni, Jenny and Angie, for example I needed to ask couple of similar questions to be able to get a question's answer and I needed to ask them to talk lauder. At that point I thought that cultural differences and similarities may cause that because Erdogan and Abdullah are males and they are from Philistine and Yuni, Jenny and Angie are females and they are from Taiwan. Ayse is the only one who is from Turkey, so the interview was very smooth with her as well because of our cultural and language similarities. After having these answers about using other tools besides studying from books, I wanted to be sure that I did not miss anything. Then, for more specific answers I have asked them similar questions one after another about using educational technology and studying on their weak skills: "What kind of technological tools do you use daily?" and "What kind of educational technology tools do you use to improve your language skills?" With these narrower questions, they gave more specific and detailed answers. At the beginning of these questions, all of them gave me the same answer which was "using computers and the Internet in daily basis". Then, while they are answering my questions, I asked them to give me some examples of specific websites, software programs or/and technology tools they were using while studying English outside of the classrooms.

Again similarly, Erdogan and Abdullah said that they were using the same software program, "Easylango", which is Arabic- English dictionary. Abdullah said:

> This is a dictionary. It gives meaning of the word in English and translates to Arabic. When you open a Word document, or any document, when you put the pointer on the word, it automatically gives you the meaning in the small box and the pronunciation of the word. So, when I read anything over the internet, I just point the word and have the meaning and the pronunciation. If I click on the word, it gives me the different meanings of the word, different style of the word, so everything about that word.

Also, they pointed out that before coming to the USA, they both studied for TOEFL and GMAT from CD's which were created for these examinations. Then, they gave some website examples, according to Erdogan: "There is a website, 'ETS.com'. This is for English grammar and some reading. I used also, not now but before coming here, Pordo University has a good website for English language. It is very famous university in Indiana State and 'ownel.com' is the name of the website." Abdullah said that:

> …I am trying to memorize these words, this is the first one….and also I downloaded an Internet program which is special for TOEFL vocabularies. It contains about 1000 word, so I try to memorize these vocabulary and it gives you a list which id the most common words in the TOEFL exam. I think it is 'www.vocaboly.com'. Also, I look at different websites. There is one excellent website which is called 'Englishpage.com'. This site is very very helpful. You can find everything like grammar stuff, exercises, quizzes, everything…. There is another website about English grammar which is called 'Englishpages.com', this is good too, but other one is better than this one. Also, before I came here I had subscription with ETS (Educational Training and Services). The organization is responsible from the TOEFL and GMAT. The website is 'ETS.org'. They developed lately a website which is called 'criterion' and this website is for improving writing skills. The address is 'http: //criterion.ets.org'. So, they give us like that….assign different topics….if you collect any one of these topics, you will find a question and when you click on the topic you will have 30 minutes to respond to the question by writing an essay. So, after 30 minutes you need to submit that essay. It automatically evaluates your essay and gives you comments about your mistakes and gives you a grade.

It is pointed out earlier; Yuni, Jenny and Angie answers very similar to each others as well. All three of them said that they were using a software program, "doctor eye", which is a Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionary. Angie said "It is a dictionary and it pronounces vocabulary very well. It translates and pronounces at the same time." Also, Yuni and Angie added that they were using "Internet dictionary" besides electronic and software dictionary. Angie explained what Internet dictionary means: "It is in the 'yahoo', but it is in my language, Chinese. It translates to English. It is from 'www.yahoo.com.tw'. It is a dictionary link. We can write the word and they translate to English." Besides these, Angie said she was using a website called 'studio cafe' which is "…for Native Chinese students because the program is produced by Americans." When I asked what kind of information could be found in the website, she answered "They are talking about what is going on in Taiwan now, or in the world now… They will show some very short shows. End of the show they remind you some vocabulary or grammar." Also, she said that she was using SPSS which is a Statistic Software Program for one of her department courses besides her ESL courses.

Other than all of the interviewee, Ayse gave the most interesting answers especially about improving speaking and listening skills with using technology. Her answers were very specific, and most of the time I did not need to ask her more questions because she already answered them herself. According to her answers:

> For my writing skills, I use laptop. With my laptop, I can write everywhere, even in the cafeteria. Also, I use 'Word' a lot and it corrects my spelling and grammar mistakes with 'Spelling and Grammar Check'. I use digital, electronic dictionary. If I don't understand a word, I write on it and find the meaning immediately. Moreover, I use 'vocabulary.com', too. Also, when I was a beginner level, I was using software, 'Basic English', which teaches colors, clothes, furniture names, etc…. Very basic things, but it helped me at that time to learn. For my reading skills, I read something from the Internet in English. For example, I read CNN, newspapers…. I read electronic stuff about technology. I surf on the Internet… CNN, Time, Magazine, NASA… Its website is so interesting… and National Geography… They especially helped me to improve my reading skills. Also, especially last year I was using "grammar.com".

When I asked to her about if she did anything for her speaking and listening skills, she answered me with laughter. Also, I thought that she was a little bit shy while answering me:

> Sometimes I taped myself with a digital camera to be able to see my lips' movements. It helps me for pronunciation, you know… With this way, and you can see what you are doing wrong and what you need to do to correct it. I also use voice recorder to record my voice and listen. Actually, you can record your voice on the computer, too. There is a program, Media Player, you know, you can record your voice. So, sometimes I use it, as well. Also, you can use the cell phone too to record your voice. When I do that, I listen later and try to learn correct pronunciation of the word.

Also, all of the interviewees were using e-mails, chat programs such as "MSN Messenger", "I Chat" in English and it is good for them to improve their informal English. While talking Angie gave very interesting information about an ESL writing class which shows us using technology is getting more common even in ESL classrooms. According to her, Angie and her classmates were using a chat program in the classroom for "writing exercise on the computer": "2 people write an essay like a group project. The teacher separates 2 people in the classroom and these people need to discuss for the project by using 'I Chat' program. This is like an in class writing exercise. They want us to use English to communicate."

Moreover, all of the interviewee said that they were using electronic dictionaries in their languages (Arabic, Chinese and Turkish) to find unknown words' meanings. Also, all of the interviewees pointed out that while studying on the computer, they were using "Microsoft Word" especially the "Spelling and Grammar" tool to check their documents. Besides Ayse, all of them talked about its benefits such as saving time, learning the correct information easily. However, Ayse pointed out a very important detail which was:

> I think there is one disadvantage of using technology which is… For example, in writing class and in regular examination, you need to write a paragraph on a topic. While using technology, laptop, you don't write with your hands and don't correct spelling mistakes by yourself. The laptop does for you, but when I am in a real examination, I sometimes cannot find the spelling. This is so hard when you write with your hands. If you use computer, it is so easy, but you learn harder and you get bad grade from the examination. However, using technology is perfect for practicing.

End of the interviews, I asked them if they believe that using technology helped them to improve their language and communication skills and all them were agreed about it. They said that it helped them to save time, helped them to make more practices and made learning interesting. According to Ayse's answer: "Of course! It helps a lot. First of all, using technology helps me to save time. For example, using electronic dictionary makes my work easier. Also, it helps me to make practice." Also Abdullah said: "I do prefer to study over the Internet, from the CDs

than from the book. I feel… I found it interesting when I study on the computer because on the computer you can watch a presentation about a topic. It is better than for me to read this topic through the paper because the computer can attract to you to read and it makes you feel not boring."

Summary

In conclusion, the interviews shows us that ESL students believe that using technology, especially using educational technology tools helps them to improve their both language and communication skills. They use the technology tools both outside and inside of the classroom to practice English and learn more about writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. In their interviews they are all agreed on benefits of using technology while learning a new language and a new culture. According to the interviews, ESL students gave some examples about some technological tools which helped them to practice English and improve their certain skills. For instance:

- Using electronic dictionary, using special dictionary software programs in their own languages (ex.: "Eyedoctor" and "Easylango") helped them to learn new vocabulary and improve their reading and writing skills. Also, Taiwanese students mentioned that using "Internet dictionary" from "www.yahoo.com.tw" help them to understand new words as much as the other dictionaries that they were talking about.
- Visiting some websites and reading articles and information from the Internet from CNN, Time, NASA, "www.vocabulary.com", "www.grammar.com", "www.ownel.com", "www.vocaboly.com", "www.Englishpage.com", "www.ETS.org", "http: //criterion.ets.org", "www.studiocafé.com" helped them in their reading, writing and using grammar skills.
- Using e-mails, chat programs such as "MSN Messenger" and "I Chat" in English helped them to improve their informal English.
- Using "Microsoft Word" and "Spelling and Grammar Check" helped them in their writing and using grammar skills.
- As it was mentioned by one of the ESL students, Ayse, recording herself with a digital camera to be able to see her lips' movements and recording her own voice by using Media Player and her cell phone helped her to improve her pronunciation and speaking skills.
- Listening to the radio and watching the TV with English subtitles helped them in their listening and communication skills.

All of the interviewees' conclusions were very similar to the each others. They said that using educational technology tools helped them to save time, helped them to make more practices and it made learning more interesting.

In addition to these findings, interviews also showed that technology, especially computers and the Internet are in our daily lives and they have been used many times a day. As an example, according to the interviewees' answers on "How much time do you spend on the computer nearly in a day?" their answers were approximately 4-5 hours a day. It looks like that computers and the Internet are some of the main necessities for people especially for young people such as

university students. When I asked the questions to them about if they were using any technology tools while studying, some of them were giving me negative answers even though I knew that they were using computers and the Internet. In some points of interviews, I needed to ask them more specific questions to get real answers. It was a very interesting observation for me to realize that using computers and Internet become a regular routine for them and they did not think that they should have talked about these tools while answering the questions. I believe that this finding supports what Bill Gates points out about technology: "The advance of technology is based on making it fit in so that you don't really even notice it, so it's part of everyday life." (Bill Gates - Microsoft from
http://www.seomonk.com/tech-quotes/technology/technology.htm)

With 21st century, computers, the Internet and all of hardware and software equipments in our daily lives and they are helping us to save time and connect to the world without leaving our houses or classrooms. Therefore, I believe that especially students and teachers need to be more aware of about all of the improvements in technology and try to benefit from it. Using educational technology tools will help both to the students and to the teachers to be more successful, efficient and practical people in their lives. Also, we all need to be more open-minded about technological innovations and open our windows to the future's novelties to be able to communicate with future generations.

Recommendations for Future Studies:

According to literature review, there are some researches on international people's experiences in the USA, but these are not enough. If it is considered that the USA has a mixed nation, for better understanding of other cultures and foreign people, it should be more research on this topic. With this way, in the future, new ESL students would have fewer problems and more awareness about previous students' experiences. Also, teachers would have more knowledge about their foreign students and their special needs and they become more efficient and successful teachers. For example, in the future, researchers can study on "Why the students who are from the same nationality experience similar problems than the other international students?", "Does having the same gender and having the same nationality affect students' experiences in the USA?", "Why the ESL students from the same nationality use the same or very similar technology tools to practice their language and communication skills?"

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you introduce yourself, for example, where are you from, what is your name, how old are you, etc?
2. When and did you come to the USA?
3. Why did you come to the USA?
4. Why do you take ESL courses?
5. Did you have any English language education before coming here?
6. In what skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening) you think that you have problems most?
7. To improve these skills what do you do besides studying from the books?
8. What kind of technological tools do you use daily?
9. What kind of educational technology tools do you use to improve your language skills?
10. Do you think using technology helps you to improve your English?
11. How much time do you spend on the computer nearly in a day?
12. Were you using technology in your daily life, before coming to the USA?
13. In what level they help you to improve your language skills?