LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON USING THE FORVO WEBSITE AS A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigated learners' perspectives on using the Forvo website to enhance their English-speaking skills within an online Discord community, "The English Hub." Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and textual analysis of Discord conversations. Inductive thematic analysis revealed that students perceived Forvo as a valuable tool, aligning with Previous Research, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and TELL principles. Forvo facilitated social interaction, provided access to native speaker pronunciations (MKOs), and served as a cultural tool, promoting pronunciation improvement, confidence building, and vocabulary acquisition. Students reported significant improvements in their speaking skills, particularly in pronunciation, accent reduction, and fluency. Forvo effectively complemented traditional learning methods, offering authentic pronunciation models, a supportive online community, and a user-friendly interface. This study highlights the potential of Forvo to empower learners in their pursuit of English fluency

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Keywords: Forvo, Language Learning, Pronunciation, Learners' Perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the greatest number of native and non-native speakers globally, English occupies a significant place on the international scene (Ethnologue, 2023). It facilitates cooperation and communication amongst people from different countries and continents by acting as the lingua franca (Graddol, 2006).This domination is present in science, technology, international business, and diplomacy. Additionally, English is the main language used for academic research and publication, giving researchers all over the world access to a wealth of knowledge (Hyland, 2007). Recognizing these continuing debates about how English affects industries like academia, business, and technology is vital, but so is assisting non-native speakers in learning English, which is one of the most vital languages to learn in order to connect and work together across borders. While taking into account the larger context of English in a globalized world, it is crucial to comprehend its historical evolution, fundamental characteristics, and contemporary applications in order to navigate communication in today's interconnected society. It is essential to investigate ways to improve the linguistic proficiency of English language learners.

The four core areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing must all be developed in order to become proficient in English (Brown, 2007). These areas, which are frequently referred to as the "four language skills," are thought to be interdependent, which means that during the language learning process, they interact and support one another (Harmer, 2007). Learners can gain a comprehensive grasp and the capacity to use language successfully in a variety of circumstances by cultivating expertise in each of these areas. One of the fundamental language abilities, speaking, is essential to interpersonal communication. It enables people to use spoken language to communicate their ideas, feelings,

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and thoughts (Brown, 2007). Speaking effectively involves not only the technical components of language production but also the capacity to talk in a variety of contexts with fluency, coherence, and appropriateness (Harmer, 2007). Control over phonetics, such as intonation, rhythm, accent, and pronunciation, is necessary.

Although there are many ways to improve speaking abilities, students frequently struggle to become fluent in spoken English, according to the researcher's real-world job experience. These difficulties can be roughly divided into three categories: psychological issues (like fear), linguistic complexity (like unfamiliar sounds), and a lack of opportunity for oral practice (Derwing et al., 2022). To overcome these obstacles and support students as they progress toward spoken proficiency, a wide range of instructional resources can be used. Forvo is a fascinating educational technology (EdTech) tool that can greatly improve the speaking abilities of English language learners. In the digital age, educational technology (EdTech) tools, which include a wide variety of digital resources that transform the teaching and learning process, significantly improve learning (Bates, 2019). These tools enable individualized learning experiences, foster collaboration, and improve student engagement by making it easier to create, deliver, and manage instructional content (Selwyn, 2011).

Forvo is a computer tool created to enhance communication abilities. Programs such as Forvo use audio recordings of native speakers and speech recognition technology to offer focused pronunciation practice and instant feedback (Asratie et al., 2023). Pupils can practice their pronunciation, fluency, and general speaking skills by listening to native speakers pronounce words. Forvo is an example of instructional technology that researchers, educators, and students should embrace. By using these tools, language learning experiences can be improved and teaching methods can be brought into line with the most recent developments. Forvo is a useful supplement to language instruction since it helps people communicate with greater confidence and eloquence. A prior study by Asratie et al. (2023) examined how well educational technology (EdTech) tools can improve students' speaking abilities. Their results

showed that using EdTech was positively correlated with gains in speech, vocabulary, accuracy, and fluency. This study opens the door for more research in this area and offers insightful information. Building on the findings of Asratie et al. (2023), future studies could examine a number of topics in greater detail, which is looking into particular EdTech tools, whereas their study looked at a variety of tools, Future studies can offer insightful information to teachers looking to maximize the use of technology in the classroom by going further into certain tools and taking learner autonomy into account. In general, this study aims to respond to the following inquiry, How do students feel about using Forvo during their language learning process? How do students feel about Forvo's ability to improve their speaking abilities? How does Forvo help students improve their speaking performance, in their opinion?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Student Perspective

The ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that students have regarding their educational experiences are referred to as student perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002). These viewpoints cover a broad variety of topics, such as curriculum content, assessment procedures, teaching and learning strategies, school atmosphere, and students' general level of satisfaction with their education (Seidman, 2006). The term "student perspective" refers to a broad range of opinions, experiences, and attitudes that students have about their education, the classroom, and the academic process in general. Since it can influence curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and institutional regulations to better meet the needs of students and improve the educational experience overall, understanding this viewpoint is essential for educators, administrators, and politicians.

Students' subjective experiences, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about their learning environment, instructional strategies, and educational resources are referred to as student perspectives in the context of educational research (Cook-Sather, 2006). It includes their opinions on the efficacy of different teaching methods, their comprehension of the learning process, and their assessments of their own skills (Magolda & Parks, 2023). Because they offer

important insights into the variables influencing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes, student perspectives are essential (Hattie & Yates, 2013). In order to better understand the learning process from the viewpoint of English language learners, educators and researchers can better tailor their instruction, create learning environments that are more effective, and develop educational tools that are tailored to each student's unique needs and preferences (Noddings, 2013).

Concept of Language Learning Strategies

The deliberate acts and behaviors used by language learners to improve their language acquisition process are known as language learning strategies (LLSs). According to Barnwell et al. (1991), learners employ a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, emotional, and social methods to help them understand, produce, and internalize a new language. Cognitive methods, such note-taking, memory, and repetition, directly manipulate the target language. Higher-order abilities known as metacognitive methods give students the ability to organize, track, and assess their own learning. The emotional components of language learning, such as self-encouragement and anxiety control, are addressed by affective techniques. According to Moore and Zancanella (2014), social techniques emphasize communication and cooperation with others, such as asking questions and taking part in discussions. Based on their purpose and the area of language learning they cover, LLSs can be divided into a number of different types.

Because they enable students to take charge of their education, overcome obstacles, and grow in independence, LLSs are seen as essential for successful language acquisition. Kurnia Asih et al.'s (2021) study, for instance, highlights the importance of differentiated education in schools. Teachers should understand the particular difficulties that students encounter and offer the right kind of assistance to help them improve their speaking abilities. This could entail utilizing a range of exercises, providing personalized feedback, and establishing a secure and supportive learning atmosphere. The importance of LLSs in the learning process has been highlighted by research showing a favorable association between their use and language competency (Turula, 2016).

Concept of Educational Technologies Tools

A wide variety of digital resources that transform the teaching and learning process are included in educational technology tools, or EdTech (Bates, 2019). For instance, a study by Syapitri Ovi et al. (2023) and Jaya et al. (2019) shows how Grammarly may be used as an educational technology tool to help students become better writers. Teachers may design more effective and engaging learning experiences that equip students for success in the digital era by utilizing these resources. These tools enable individualized learning experiences, foster collaboration, and improve student engagement by making it easier to create, deliver, and manage instructional content (Selwyn, 2011). They include a range of features that help teachers design successful and captivating learning environments (Mambu et al., 2023). Teachers are better equipped to make decisions and take advantage of technology's potential to improve student learning when they are aware of the different kinds of educational technology available, including Learning Management Systems (LMSs), Content Creation and Delivery Tools, Assessment and Evaluation Tools, Communication and Collaboration Tools, Assistive Technologies, and Immersive Technologies.

Careful preparation and an emphasis on pedagogy rather than the instrument itself are necessary for the successful incorporation of educational technology. For implementation to be successful, instructors must get sufficient support and chances for professional growth (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Teachers also need to ensure appropriate use of digital technologies and address concerns of equitable access (Miao et al., 2023). Educational technology tools have developed into potent catalysts for life-changing learning experiences, surpassing their previous function as just supplemental materials in the classroom (Haleem et al., 2022). For instance, e-books and other digital tools are being used more and more in the field of educational technology to improve language acquisition. According to a prior study (Merentika Arianda et al., 2023), EFL students had positive opinions of e-books for reading, especially when it came to encouraging self-directed learning. Beyond dazzling graphics and interactive features, they have an impact on resident engagement, teamwork, individualized learning, and, eventually, student

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accomplishment (Hew & Brush, 2007). Examining how educational technology affects student teaching and learning is crucial as it becomes more widespread.

Concept of Forvo

Forvo is an online platform that uses crowdsourced pronunciation recordings to help people learn languages. Forvo enables students to hear native speakers pronounce certain words and phrases in a variety of languages, in contrast to traditional dictionaries that frequently simply provide printed phonetic symbols (Heil et al., 2016). This method encourages a more natural and interesting way of learning pronunciation. Forvo is a useful tool for language learners who want to get better at pronouncing words correctly. It provides a dynamic and captivating learning experience because of its interactive aspect and emphasis on recordings of local speakers. For instance, a study by Hermansyah (2021) showed how self-talk might boost students' confidence when speaking. Tools such as Forvo can supplement this approach by giving pupils precise pronunciation models, which will boost their confidence and speaking fluency even more. Teachers can strengthen students' oral communication abilities in a comprehensive way by combining Forvo with self-talk exercises. It's crucial to be mindful of any possible restrictions on correctness and the emphasis on specific terms, though. According to Asratie et al. (2023), Abdelbaki (2023), and Banibdelrahman (2013), Forvo can be successfully combined with other language learning resources and tools to provide a thorough approach to pronunciation development. These studies also demonstrate the beneficial effects of different educational technology tools on the speaking abilities of EFL students. None, however, go into detail on the FORVO website or its special features, such as pronunciation models for native speakers. (Sosas, 2021) adopts a more comprehensive stance, looking at how technology generally affects speech rather than concentrating on specific platforms like Forvo. A multimedia approach for improving speaking fluency that focuses on pre-service teachers is examined by (Diyyab, 2014). This is not the same as the researcher's explicit goal of focusing on pronunciation. Research on how students view the advantages and difficulties

of speaking English, especially with regard to pronunciation, is lacking. The effect of the Forvo website on the speaking abilities of English language learners has not been specifically examined in previous research. Although some studies (like Diyyab, 2014) focus on fluency, none particularly address pronunciation enhancement, which is one of the Forvo website's main advantages.

Concept of Speaking

One essential component of human communication is speaking, which is the act of generating audible language (Crystal, 2018). It enables us to communicate our thoughts and feelings, form bonds with others, and function in social situations. Speaking effectively involves a dynamic interaction of verbal and nonverbal communication components, going beyond simple vocabulary and syntax (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Speaking effectively is crucial for success in a variety of fields. In academic settings, effective communication skills are essential because they enable students to present research, engage in active conversation, and effectively express their opinions (Lea & Street, 1998; Sari et al., 2022). Speaking clearly is essential in the workplace for making presentations, running meetings, and closing sales (Lucas & Stob, 2020). Additionally, effective speaking improves social interactions and interpersonal relationships in daily life (Remland, 2020).

3.   METHODS

The socio-cultural theory of language learning (L. S. Vygotsky, 2020) serves as the foundation for this study. It highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural context in language acquisition, as well as the concepts of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL). It aims to comprehend how learners' learning experiences and perspectives interact with the Forvo website, a technological tool that offers real pronunciation models, to affect the development of their speaking abilities.

The English Hub Discord server served as the sole online platform for the study investigating students' opinions about using the Forvo website to improve their speaking abilities. Data was gathered throughout the 2023–2024 school year over the course of one week.

The online Discord community "The English Hub," an international virtual area devoted to language instruction and exchange, served as the source of research participants. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were combined to choose the participants. The final sample size was 15 participants because, according to the study by Hennink and Kaiser (2022), if the student participants were relatively homogeneous in terms of their language learning backgrounds, the research questions were specifically focused on aspects of using Forvo, and the objective was to achieve code saturation or identify the main themes and patterns, then a sample size of 15 participants might be adequate for the qualitative study.

To investigate the phenomena of learners' perceptions on using the Forvo website as a tool to improve their speaking abilities inside the online Discord community, The English Hub, this study used a qualitative case study approach. This approach was selected because it offers a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon in its real-world setting, in this instance the online language learning community.

In order to give a thorough grasp of how English language learners view using the Forvo website to improve their speaking abilities, the data for this qualitative case study was gathered from a variety of sources inside the online Discord community, The English Hub. To guarantee the reliability and accuracy of the qualitative findings, a number of data validity procedures were used. First, triangulation was employed by combining information from several sources, including questionnaires, student interviews, and textual analysis. This lessened the possibility of bias from depending just on one data source and enabled a more thorough picture of the topic being studied. Last but not least, member checking was used, in which participants had the chance to examine and confirm the veracity of the researchers' interpretations and the transcribed interviews.

Inductive The data gathered for the study was examined using thematic analysis. The first step in the thematic analysis method was becoming acquainted with the data, which involved reading the transcripts and written responses several times. Data presentation is the second step. In this stage, the chosen information is shown in a variety of ways, including essays, tables, classifications, and other pertinent formats. The drawing and validation of conclusions is the last phase. Following the display of the data, the researcher draws conclusions from the original research questions.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that it is directly consistent with sociocultural theory (L. S. Vygotsky, 2020), which emphasizes the significant influence of social interaction and cultural setting on cognitive development. Essentially, it suggests that learning is a collaborative process influenced by our interactions with others and the resources our culture offers, rather than merely an individual endeavor. According to (L. S. Vygotsky, 2020), social connection is the cornerstone of cognitive growth. Students gain information by interacting with others, especially those who possess greater expertise or knowledge. Through its community forum and user-generated information, Forvo encourages social engagement while providing scaffolding to help students attain new comprehension levels. Pupils can participate in conversations, ask for pronunciations, and share knowledge with one another. His focus on social interaction as a means of learning is in line with this collaborative setting.

According to L. S. Vygotsky's (2020) theory, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is a person who is more knowledgeable or skilled than the learner in a given task, procedure, or idea. A teacher, parent, peer, or even a computer could be the source of this. The learner is guided within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by the MKO. As MKOs, native speakers on Forvo help learners close the gap between their current comprehension and the proper pronunciation by offering advice and encouragement through their natural pronunciations. In the ZPD, where the student is challenged but not overburdened, learning happens most efficiently. By offering clear examples of proper pronunciation, Forvo enables students to work within their ZPD. With the platform's assistance, learners may compare their pronunciation to that of native speakers, listen to them, and progressively improve their abilities.

(L. S. Vygotsky, 2020) highlighted how cultural tools influence how people think. These tools can be symbolic (like language or number

systems) or tangible (like books or computers). They offer a framework for learning and mediate how we perceive the world. One could consider Forvo to be a cultural instrument that facilitates language acquisition. It exposes students to a wide range of accents and dialects by giving them access to a huge collection of real pronunciations. Their knowledge of the language and its cultural background is expanded as a result of this encounter. Additionally, By giving precise instances of spoken language, Forvo strengthens the link between language and mind. By internalizing these instances, learners can enhance their pronunciation and expand their language comprehension. The ideas of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) are likewise aligned with the use of technology to support and improve language acquisition.

Nonetheless, the purpose of this study was to determine how students felt about utilizing the Forvo website as a speaking practice tool. Three research questions will be examined. How do students feel about using Forvo in their language learning process? That is the first question. The next query is: How do students assess Forvo's contribution to their speaking skill development? Finally, how does Forvo fit into students' overall language learning plans?

Learners' interest in using Forvo

The open-ended questionnaire's six questions about students' interest in using Forvo in their language learning process indicate that general opinions about the platform are favorable. They reported feeling much more confident when speaking English as a result. The ability to identify areas for development, the diversity of native speaker recordings, and the way it made vocabulary acquisition more fun were the features they found most appealing. Several thematic analyses from interviews about student experiences and their interest in Forvo further support all claims, including improved pronunciation and accent, enhanced confidence and fluency, and the usage of Forvo as a comprehensive language learning instrument. Pupils frequently point out how much Forvo has improved their accent and pronunciation. Students gain confidence and have more fluid conversations when they can practice pronouncing words and phrases correctly by listening to native speakers.

The findings are consistent with those of Asratie et al. (2023), who found that students had favorable opinions about using instructional speaking technology to improve their speaking abilities. In particular, the students loved using educational speaking technologies in their speaking sessions and showed interest in doing so. This suggests that the use of instructional speaking technology was viewed well by the students. Additionally, (Sosas, 2021) demonstrates that these technology tools help students learning to speak English become more confident, reduce anxiety and uncertainty, and improve fluency and accuracy. With the use of these resources, students can improve their speaking abilities.

There are, nevertheless, issues and recommendations for enhancement. Along with the need for complementary approaches, several views express enthusiasm and optimism for increased features, broader material, and greater integration with the language learning environment. Overall, this study supports the finding that students' good opinions of educational technology were demonstrated by their answers when asked if they would like to utilize it for speaking exercises. Additionally, the students reported that using speaking instructional technology improved their English speaking abilities.

Learners' view on the effectiveness of Forvo

According to the open-ended questionnaire's six questions about learners' perceptions of Forvo's efficacy, the overall user experience has been revolutionary. Fluency, self-assurance, and general communication abilities have all significantly improved as a result. Even if it could be better, Forvo has been a useful resource for their English language education.

Thematic analysis has been used to examine a number of interviews for additional research. The theme analysis's findings demonstrate the variety of ways in which Forvo aids in language acquisition. Students value the platform's emphasis on real-world language usage, user-friendly interface, community assistance, accurate pronunciations, and integration with other technologies. When taken as a whole, these elements enable students to improve their pronunciation, increase their vocabulary, and build their confidence for

speaking in public. Forvo becomes a vital tool for language learners of all skill levels by catering to a variety of learning requirements and offering useful language materials. Additionally, the examination of the 11 photos from chat logs shows that the main topic is the positive recommendation of pronunciation resources. This subject, which emphasizes how beneficial and educational the teachings are, appears in all 11 photographs (100%). The usefulness of Forvo is demonstrated by the fact that users are sharing and recommending it to help with language acquisition and speech enhancement.

The findings are consistent with research by Alshumaimeri and Alhumud (2021), who discuss how to optimize the effects of language learning tools like Forvo by incorporating them into larger educational frameworks. The same is true of the study by Abdelbaki (2023), which examines how ICTs (information and communication technologies) might improve students' speaking abilities while emphasizing how well ICT tools work to create a dynamic and interesting learning environment. This is consistent with Forvo's beneficial impact on language learners. One of the main issues noted in Abdelbaki's study—improving speaking abilities through technology—is directly addressed by Forvo, an ICT application that offers natural pronunciation by native speakers. Similar to other ICT tools, Forvo builds an engaging and interactive learning environment by providing a platform where students may hear, imitate, and practice real-world pronunciations (Abdelbaki, 2023). ICT use, such as Forvo, is a strong motivator in both situations, boosting students' comfort and self-assurance when speaking the target language. This link emphasizes how Forvo can be combined with other ICT techniques to optimize the improvement of English language learners' speaking abilities.

Learners' viewpoint on the roles of Forvo

The final three open-ended questions about the learners' perceptions of Forvo's functions centered on how Forvo improves speaking abilities. All things considered, Forvo is regarded as a useful language learning aid that enhances more conventional resources like teachers and textbooks. Although it has certain disadvantages, its special advantages make it a useful tool for learners. The results of the

interviews also continuously highlight how important Forvo is for improving pronunciation and speaking confidence. Hearing precise pronunciations from native speakers gives language learners the resources they need to become proficient in the language's sounds and improve their communication skills. They may now converse in person without reluctance or worry of mispronouncing words since they have gained confidence. According to the data, Forvo is much more useful for language learners than only a pronunciation guide. The website enables students to become fluent in their target language, acquire cultural understanding, master pronunciation, and interact with a friendly community. By providing a comprehensive method for learning languages, Forvo becomes a vital resource that changes the educational process, boosts self-esteem, and cultivates a passion for languages that lasts a lifetime.

This study can therefore support the findings of Asratie et al. (2023), which show that students also recognized the important roles that some instructional speaking tools, like Forvo, had in improving their speaking abilities.

5.   CONCLUSION

This study investigates how students view using Forvo to improve their speaking abilities. According to the results, students who use Forvo as a tool to improve their speaking abilities have overwhelmingly positive opinions of the website. Users report notable gains in vocabulary, confidence, and pronunciation, demonstrating Forvo's efficacy in their eyes. The wide variety of native speaker recordings, the capability to pinpoint areas for pronunciation development, and the fun method of memorizing vocabulary were especially appreciated by the students, demonstrating the significant impact that Forvo had on their language learning process. These results, which demonstrated Forvo's beneficial effects on pronunciation, accent reduction, confidence, and fluency, were supported by thematic analysis of the interviews and textual analysis of the chat logs. Despite its drawbacks, Forvo gives language learners the ability to improve their pronunciation, learn about different cultures, interact with other language learners, and eventually work toward fluency. Forvo fosters a lifetime love of language

learning and builds confidence by providing a comprehensive approach to language acquisition.

We may infer that Forvo is a language learning tool that adheres to the ideas of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. The use of educational speaking technology tools, such as Forvo, to improve speaking performance has been well received by students. They are eager to use Forvo because they believe it can significantly improve their speaking abilities. With Forvo, students can practice speaking by mimicking the pronunciations of native speakers. Thus, pupils improve their speaking abilities when they utilize Forvo and practice their pronunciation enough. Therefore, it is advised that students use Forvo as a tool to enhance their speaking ability, addressing issues with spoken English fluency development, linguistic difficulties (such as novel sounds), psychological aspects (such as anxiety), and a lack of opportunities for spoken practice.

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