

# *Effectiveness of Using Digital Libraries As A Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Esl Learners' Speaking and Reading Skills<sup>1</sup>*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research seeks to study the effectiveness of using digital libraries as a pedagogical tool to enhance ESL learners' speaking and reading skills. It is no longer news that the standards of English in Cameroon are falling and studies like Ndongmanji (2005) and Tabah (2010) attest to this. The literature on falling standards of English in Cameroon is not limited and it's not sufficient either. Some factors attributed to this falling standard of English in Cameroon such as the method of teaching, curriculum, and class sizes amongst others. Many measures have been implemented to redress this situation but no results have been attained. The point of interest here is access to a good digital library and its effective use will contribute greatly to better knowledge acquisition and English in particular. To attain good results for this study, data was collected using observation of students and teachers, administration of questionnaires, and interviews, the theoretical framework used to analyze our data is the constructivism theory. Among the six schools wherein this study was conducted, four schools had access to digital library resources while the others did not. It was observed that among the four schools with access to the digital libraries, two make effective use of it by teachers and students which is reflected in their performance in spoken and written English in general which ties very well with our hypothesis. At the end of this research, it was purposed that the government of Cameroon and school authorities should take up the issue of digital libraries seriously since the world is becoming more digitalized and there is the rising need tag along starting from our schools.

**Keywords:** *Digital Library, English as a Second Language, Pedagogy, Cameroon*

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## **Dijital Kütüphanelerin Yabancı Dil Öğrencilerinin Konuşma ve Okuma Becerilerini Geliştirmek İçin Pedagojik Bir Araç Olarak Kullanılması**

### **ÖZ**

Bu araştırma, ESL öğrencilerinin konuşma ve okuma becerilerini geliştirmek için Pedagojik bir araç olarak dijital kütüphanelerin kullanılmasının etkinliğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kamerun'da İngilizce standartlarının düştüğü artık yeni bir haber değil ve Ndongmanji (2005) ve Tabah (2010) gibi çalışmalar bunu kanıtıyor. Kamerun'da düşen İngilizce standartlarına ilişkin literatür sınırlı olmadığı gibi yeterli de değildir. Kamerun'da İngilizce standartlarının düşmesinde öğretim yöntemi, müfredat, sınıf büyüklükleri gibi bazı faktörler etkili olmuştur. Bu durumu düzeltmek için birçok önlem alınmış ancak sonuç alınamamıştır. Burada dikkat edilmesi gereken nokta, iyi bir dijital kütüphaneye erişim ve bu kütüphanenin etkin kullanımı, genel olarak daha iyi bilgi edinimine ve özel olarak da İngilizceye büyük katkı sağlayacaktır. Bu çalışmada iyi sonuçlar elde etmek için veriler öğrenci ve öğretmenlerin gözlemlenmesi, anketlerin uygulanması ve görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın yürütüldüğü 6 okuldan 4'ünün dijital kütüphane kaynaklarına erişimi varken diğerlerinin yoktur. Dijital kütüphaneye erişimi olan 4 okuldan 2'sinin öğretmen ve öğrencileri tarafından etkin bir şekilde kullanıldığı ve bunun da genel olarak sözlü ve yazılı İngilizce performanslarına yansıdığı gözlemlenmiştir ki bu da bu araştırmanın sonunda amaçlanan hipotezimizle çok iyi örtüşmektedir Kamerun hükümetinin ve okul yetkililerinin dijital kütüphaneler konusunu ciddiyle ele almaları amaçlanmıştır çünkü dünya giderek dijitalleşmektedir ve okullarımızdan başlayarak dijital kütüphanelere duyulan ihtiyaç artmaktadır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Kütüphane, İkinci Dil Olarak İngilizce, Pedagoji, Kamerun*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research studies the effectiveness of using digital libraries as a pedagogical tool to enhance ESL learners speaking and reading skills. Our participants are some ESL students in the center region of Cameroon whose first language is French and English as a second language. The twenty first (21<sup>st</sup>) century has been characterized as a knowledge age, the implication of this in the global age wherein we find ourselves is that knowledge is an important commodity for self and community development, and to acquire this knowledge, you must seek to imbibe it by studying. With the rapid advancement in technology in this present age, education is no longer a thing of the past wherein education was supported by individuals in a particular setting and time but with technological advancement on the rise, people are now familiarizing themselves with new methods of education and acquiring a new language known as e-learning which is an education system assisted by computer networks which equally necessitates the digitalization of library services to aid education and language learning

process which has been appreciated by ESL teachers and students. It is no doubt that the nature of libraries has evolved beyond a building setting and made digital thereby providing solutions to long hours of waiting and searching for a single book, journal, or useful materials. With access to internet services, you can get access to e-books and e-journals which are quick, adequate, and up-to-date. With these technological innovations at their peak, ESL instructors have taken it upon themselves to help break down ESL learners learning barriers and to enhance students' learning experiences. Therefore, every institution and language learning center should own an equipped and up-to-date computer center and make available internet services to assist ESL instructors and learners in their quest to acquire a second language.

### **Research Questions**

This Research is guided by the following questions:

Does digital library enhance the acquisition of knowledge in general and improve the learner's speaking and reading skills?

Do students from secondary schools that have access to e-library show higher English language proficiency than those from schools without?

How does the use of e-library resources like textbooks, encyclopedias, journals, and publications influence learners of the English language in their academic performance?

Does the use of digital libraries aid the teaching of English as a second language?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The Constructivism Theory**

This subsection examines the constructivism theory in which we will analyze the data collected. The constructivism theory was propounded by Jean Piaget in 1972. Learning here is viewed as the process of adjusting our mental capacity to accommodate new experiences. This makes this theory particularly relevant to our argument that students who use digital libraries responsibly are expected to perform better in learning English than those who do not. According to Piaget, children learn through adaptation which is the ability to adjust to one's environment through actual and tangible research. In its concept, Piaget believed that humans learn through the logical construction of knowledge structure one step after the other to acquire new skills. In this conceptual framework, Campbell (1997) observes that Piaget used the word assimilation to describe the acquisition of new skills or knowledge from the interaction with the learner's environment and accommodation was the same process, but the result being a modification of one's pre-existing knowledge. With this framework, the individual learner and his environment are singled out as important parameters.

### **The Individual**

In the learning process, the individual is an important parameter; ideas from the individual are seen to interact with information from the environment and the result of such an interaction is internalized structures which the learner evolves for himself/herself in this interaction, and as individuals bring an argument of

their knowledge from their experiences, two relevant processes take place, which is accommodation and assimilation. As an individual assimilates new information, he or she incorporates it into an already existing framework without necessarily changing its framework. This may be in the situation where new experiences conform to the learner's internal representation of the world, but it may also contradict the individual's internal representations. In this case, they may change their perception of the experiences.

Accommodation on the other hand entails reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences. This is the mechanism by which failure leads to learning.

### **The Environment**

What is emphasized here is not the individual, but the environment where the learner finds himself/herself. Here the influence of cultural and social context in the learning process is emphasized. The environment gives the learner the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experiences through which they can search for patterns and construct their models. The individual needs an environment that stimulates meaning-making. Individual knowledge is said to be created internally through a person's interaction with the external world. Concerning our topic on digital library and language proficiency, the digital library facilitates the English language knowledge creation, whereby the individual functions in an independent learning, inquiry-based environment to improve their English language proficiency.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Kwestan H. Ahmed and Akyıldız (2022) examined the role of digital literacy in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching. Their focus was on EFL secondary school (SS) and High school (HS) teachers to determine their level of digital literacy and see if they understand the position of digital tools in EFL instruction. They discovered that HS teachers had more understanding of digital literacy than the SS teachers and also that both HS and SS were comfortable using digital tools in EFL instruction. Finally, both HS and SS teachers attested that digital technologies have been of great importance in their teaching process.

Marsini (2023) used a descriptive qualitative approach to determine the effectiveness of an electronic library (E-library) in elementary school students' social studies with an emphasis on reading skills. He discovered that E-Library was effective in shaping elementary school students' literacy abilities in social subjects.

Antonio D. J. R. and Isabel M. G. C. (2022) examined the use of digital tools in the English classroom in Spain. Their study was focused on preparing English teachers for future challenges of using digital tools in teaching in case face-to-face fails and also placed more concern on upgrading digital tools in EFL classrooms. However, their principal objective was focused on designing a program that will be in charge of the development of digital awareness of English teachers on which

emphasis will be tilted more toward the use of digital tools in the educational sector at large and foreign language teaching, in particular, looking at its pros and cons of implementation in the classroom.

Melor MD Yunus et al. (2014) in their research article on the “future of ICT as a pedagogical tool in ESL teaching and learning” focused on finding out the level at which secondary school teachers understand the future of ICT as a pedagogical tool and understand their take on the future of ICT on tomorrow’s teachers. They discovered that ICT has the power to impact teachers in the future in terms of their teaching methodology and evaluation. However, they concluded that in years ahead the function of the teacher will move from classroom discussion to online forums with learners, the teacher will no longer be a provider but a facilitator.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Questionnaire

To accurately identify the needs of users, and collect their views on the effectiveness of using digital libraries as a pedagogical tool to enhance ESL learners’ speaking and reading skills, our first instrument is the administration of questionnaires in which the investigation focused on the first sample of sixty-six people resource.

### Target Population

For this study, six secondary schools were used, three from the Northwest Region and three from the Southwest Region

**Table 1.** Target Population

| SELECTED SCHOOLS                                      | NUMBERS               |
|---|-----------------------|
| Cameroon College of Arts and Science (CCAST) Bambili. | 10 students 1 Teacher |
| Government Bilingual High School Buea (G.H.S)         | 10 students 1 Teacher |
| Government Technical High School (G.T.H.S) Widikum    | 10 students 1 Teacher |
| Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School (OLLSS) Mankon   | 10 students 1 Teacher |
| Saint Joseph College Sasse (SJCS)                     | 10 students 1 Teacher |
| Standard Secondary School Fontem                      | 10 students 1 Teacher |

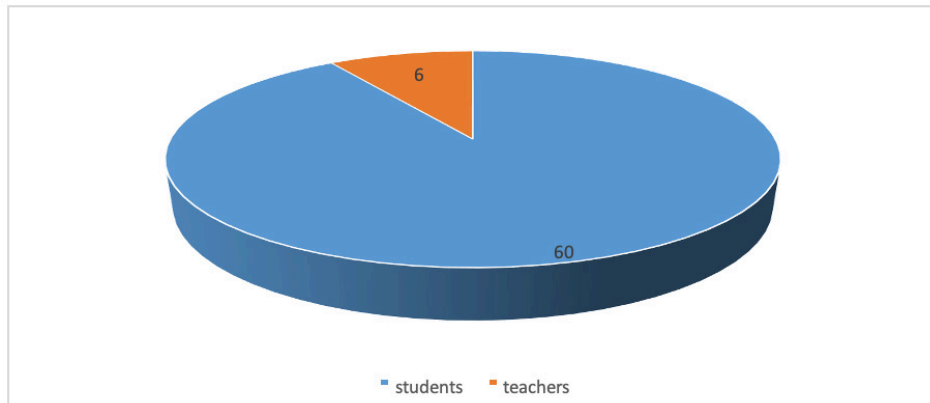
### Students

Sixty questionnaires were administered to 10 students each from the six selected schools to find out the effectiveness of using digital libraries to determine the speaking and reading proficiency of these ESL learners. The questionnaire was divided into sections. Section A was based on YES or NO choice on the use of digital libraries and section B was based on personal decision answers.

### To Teachers

A total of six questionnaires were administered to six ESL teachers from the six selected schools to find if they make use of the resources available for them in

the digital library space and if the use of digital libraries influences their students' proficiency in speaking and reading. One teacher was chosen from each of the selected schools with a six-question questionnaire.



**Chart 1.** *Representation of Questionnaire*

### **Usage of Digital Library Observation**

Another method used for data collection in this study was to observe the usage of digital libraries by learners. Worth mentioning here is the fact that we had the opportunity to observe the students in the computer center. We observed both before and during sampling. In G.H.S Buea to be precise, we had the opportunity to sit in the computer center and observed the number of students who visited the center, the type of books they read apart from the other activities they carry out, and how well they can access e-books to facilitate their reading and speaking skills. We also observe how many computer staff work there and how they behave. The same process was observed in the other schools.

### **Interviews**

The interview is defined by Bardin (1977) as a conversation initiated by the interviewer to obtain relevant research information. Conversations that are centered by the researcher on the contents determined by the objective search will allow us to gather information on a deeper level and in a more personalized manner. Although it takes time and cannot be reserved for a limited number of people, the interviewer will be useful to collect qualitative data by this technique, we have two broad objectives.

- To gather factual information
- observing the attitudes of participant

For some critics, interviews with open questions are not objective because respondents may be disoriented or confused, or can be influenced by investigators who will try to explain issues in the case of misunderstanding. In this study, this technique was chosen because it will allow the respondent who is singularly taken to express themselves freely and serenely while having the feeling of being

taken seriously. The interview inquiry was therefore chosen as a complementary instrument for collecting data to clarify some written questionnaires and more information for data collection.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics is the term given to the analysis of data that helps describe, show, or summarize data in a meaningful way such that patterns may emerge from the data. Descriptive statistics is very important because if we simply present our raw data, it will be hard to visualize what the data was showing especially if there was a lot of it. In this work, the data we collected will be analyzed through descriptive statistics. However, since descriptive statistics does not allow us to make conclusions we will use the inferential statistics.

### **Discussion of Findings from Students**

It should be noted that only students from the six secondary schools answered the questionnaires, the majority of the students from the four schools answered the questionnaire till the end while the other two schools without access to a digital library did not answer all the questions. Item 1 of the students' questionnaire sought for whether their schools have access to digital libraries. Most of the students 66.7% affirm the fact that they have access to digital libraries in their respective schools, while 33.3% declined to the fact. This means that all six schools did not have access to digital library resources, therefore, limiting the user from having the opportunity to enhance their speaking and reading skills.

One of the numerous questions sought to find out the frequency of students based on how often they visit the computer center to access the digital library resources in a week. Here majority of students 21% visit the center twice a week 11.7% say as many times as possible and 17.5% once a week. We are assuming here that the decree of students who visit the center as long as it is open shows how effectively they use the digital library than those who visit once a week or twice a week which is reflected in their proficiency.

The next item was for two schools without access to a digital library if the absence of the digital library affects their proficiency in learning English as a second language. We noticed that 33.3% of the responses said YES while the other 66.7% of the students did not answer the question because schools have access to digital library resources. This shows that these respondents even with the absence of digital libraries, the students know the role a library can play in their language acquisition process talk more about a digital library that is easily accessible and so they attest to the fact the absence of digital libraries affects their proficiency in English.

The next item was the point which sought to find out the kind of activities students carry out in the center. Here 42.5% of the students go to the center to read respectively and 7.5% go to do group work. It should be noted that from this

item to the last one that will be discussed, 33.3% of the students did not answer the questions because it was dealing with schools that have libraries and their schools do not have libraries so they never had the opportunity to do their activity unlike the other students and so in effect will cause them to perform poorly in the learning of English as an L2.

Furthermore, we equally wanted to find out the type of resources students who visit the center access and we discovered that 62.5% read textbooks and encyclopedias and least responded to periodicals and encyclopedias. While 17.5% of the students observed mostly from mission schools say all. This means that students visit the digital center and read books closely related to the English language that improve their proficiency in learning English as an L2.

The next item was interested in how users find resources in the digital library space here, 52.5% were average satisfactory with documentary resources available and 2.5% were not satisfactory showing the library resources to an extent have the resources to help them improve their proficiency just that some of the students do not make use of the available resources. It should be noted that the two schools' libraries did not respond.

Another question sought to find out how students are received and treated by the center staff, and it was quite disheartening to note that 40% of the students said their attitude must be improved and 30% said average good while 30% did not respond to the question. From the response, we noticed that the center staff's attitude must be constantly improved in order not to scare students from visiting the center and so affect them since they won't be comfortable accessing digital library resources, where some students find the center staff welcoming, and act as a facilitator, encourages students to keep visiting the center for studies and if possible increase their proficiency.

When asked if students have ever visited the services of an onsite or traditional library, here out of the 60 respondents, we noticed from the data collected that 62.5% of the respondents said NO and this were mostly students from mission schools because according to them, they have access to digital library services which is very quick and reliable.

Talking of how services of an online library help students quickly find information to assist in their learning of the English language only students with access to digital libraries in their schools answered 47.2% said YES it does help them to quickly access information when while 52.8% did not respond to the question because some schools have libraries but not digital libraries while other students do not have either of the services which in turn limits the learning abilities.

From the amount of data collected, 66.7% in their opinion affirmed the fact that it will be useful for their libraries to be digitalized and 33.3% were not sure of what would be their response.



According to the majority of the students who filled out the questionnaire, 25% of the students affirmed that they face issues using the digital library and 62.5% of the students said NO. It is important for seminars and training to be carried out so the student can learn how to access information needed for their language study. Finally further suggestions on how users of the library will want it to look like as far as what be done to improve users' satisfaction. Out of the eight suggestions, many went in for English language books used in school to be made available on the digital library space. This will enable students to have enough resourceful information which will help them get positive feedback.

### **Discussion of Findings from Teachers' Questionnaire**

One of the items from the teacher's questionnaire sought to find out if their schools have access to digital libraries 66.7% said YES indicating that a school has to have access to digital libraries since the world is evolving and the role of a digital library cannot be undermined and the 33.3% said they don't have not because they are not aware but still hoping their schools can access one.

The next item is based on whether each class has a day to visit the center. In this item, schools with digital libraries answered and in that light, 16.7% said YES while 50% said NO which was surprising to get a NO from 50% indicating these respondents do not emphasize and encourage the compulsory attendance of students and show that students go when they choose to without any supervision. According to responses from teachers mostly from government schools, students spend 1-2 hours in the center per week while students mostly from mission schools spend 50% time in the center as long as it is open. Emphasis should be placed mostly on day school students to create 3-4 hours to access digital library resources in a week since most of them close from school at 2:45 pm. It's clear students who visit the center especially when it is open find answers to their questions in reading and speaking when interacting or using the language.

According to the teachers who filled in the questionnaires, the percentage was evenly distributed showing 33.3% responded there are always teachers to ensure students visit the center when they are supposed to and provide assistance, if need be, they create awareness to students how helpful digital library information will help them in their language journey and 33.3 % negate this assertion.

More so, a total of 66.7% affirm there are books in available to students online in the domain of English language teaching and learning. This shows that students are provided with books in English since most students are quick to understand accessing these materials after lectures will improve their reading and speaking skills.

The next item sought for whether DL facilitates the teaching of English as an L2 and out of the 6 respondents, 4 were able to attest to the fact that DL has facilitated their teaching process since most students turn to research on their own while the other 2 did not respond. This has proven to a greater extent that using DL as a pedagogical tool will go a long way to improving ESL skills.

Lastly, on the question of whether DL enhances student performance, the data collected shows that out of the six respondents, 4 responded positively and 2 did not.

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE INTERVIEW**

We listened attentively to some of the points raised by students during the interview phase while taking into consideration the importance of the digital library to students and their different opinions on how digital libraries enhance their learning English as an L2. Data was analyzed about their points of view concerning whether the digital library enhances their proficiency in learning English without a digital library and apart from the school's digital library if they visit other digital centers to access the libraries to study and improve their knowledge acquisition in L2.

Several students were interviewed concerning how digital library resources help improve their reading and speaking skills and their proficiency in learning English as L2. Some students said they find textbooks in the internet library that they use to practice reading, speaking, and studying English when the teacher comes to class to teach they understand better because they have already accessed books from the digital library source. Other students say they access digital library resources only when they have exams or text so they access their digital textbooks in English to understand the concept better to pass; when other students were asked why they go to the center some said they do not go to the center because they do not feel free others said they do not go because they don't have time to visit the center and don't know how to access e-books. Some equally said they go there only during their free time to study whereas other students without digital center said they do not go I asked if they face difficulties while studying and they said yes.

The students were questioned again if aside from digital centers which they do not have they visit other library sources to follow up their language acquisition process and some said no their communities do not have either of the library sources.

From the analysis of data collected above in the foregoing paragraphs, one can say some students see how important the digital library is in helping them with reading speaking, and studying English as an L2 while other students do not see the need to use the digital library, some do not see the need because their schools do not have digital centers or libraries in schools or their communities. In all majority of the students affirm that digital library in general has a positive impact on their language process.

### **Interview with Teachers**

All our six teachers were interviewed and when asked what they think about digital library and language learning some stated that digital library has been a breakthrough in language teaching as it has helped to define many limitations for

both the learner and instructor. Some said new technologies have been helpful in education but the place of digital libraries in language has been the greatest milestone attained for language instruction and learning. When asked about students' reaction to this innovation, some said it has not been easy since digital libraries were introduced in education as a whole and in language learning in particular, since some students up till now do not understand its importance in language learning while some are still ignorant on the use. Some understand the importance but just get too lazy to make use of the beautiful innovation. However, they said a majority of the students make good use of it and it reflects their language proficiency. When asked how digital libraries have helped them in language teaching, they confess that digital libraries have been of help to them in that it has facilitated their teaching process since many students do a lot of research on their own challenging them to also go beyond what they have read thereby making understanding easy, they also state digital library has helped them access more material to ease language teaching, they also stated digital libraries have provided a sustainable solution to language problems. However, they recommend that schools and government officials organize conferences and seminars to educate teachers and students more on the important role digital libraries play in language learning and teaching and most especially on how to use and access information and materials on the internet space.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research set out to investigate the effectiveness of using digital libraries in the learning of ESL. Therefore, after visiting several schools and interacting with the students and teachers, it is safe to say DL plays a vital role in English as a second language learning and that it is advisable to include digital technologies in the teaching and learning of ESL since we are in a fast-changing world in terms of technology. DL and other digital technologies should be encouraged in the school milieu most especially in second language acquisition.

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