

Knowledge Attitude and Practice of Students Towards Online Communication in EFL

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Abstract

Online learning refers to education that occurs through the Internet using technological tools such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, and PCs. This study intends to determine how structural equation modeling (SEM) can be used to evaluate the adequacy of the variables included in the knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) model concerning online communication in English as a foreign language (EFL). An exploratory study was conducted with 112 female undergraduate English language program (ELP) students at the King Khalid University of Saudi Arabia. A KAP questionnaire was distributed to those students using a Google form. The data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 20. The SEM analysis was conducted using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software version 5.0. The results showed that the mean score of KAP toward online communication in EFL was 3.78, 3.90, and 3.70, respectively. The mean practice score is lower than the mean knowledge and attitude score. The SEM analysis demonstrated that the variables used in the KAP model are positively related ($p < 0.05$). Variables used in the KAP questionnaire are adequately fit to evaluate the ELP students' KAP toward online communication in EFL. Hence, policymakers can utilize these variables to assess the students' KAP toward online communication in EFL at HEIs. The findings of KAP can aid universities in framing and implementing appropriate strategies to motivate online communication and enhance the student's English language skills.

Keywords: attitude, knowledge, practice, EFL, online

1. Introduction

The concept of online education has been widely adopted in the digital age because to the enormous and quick developments in communication and technology, making its practices a global no-returning point and thanks to its ever-increasing accessibility, openness, and flexibility Harasim (2000). Schools and universities have taken enormous and bold steps to address the phenomena of being away from conventional class courses in order to deal with this tough upheaval. In order to maintain some degree of educational continuity and life at schools and universities, teachers are thus need to change their teaching approaches by choosing internet-based learning (Abou et al., (2014). A knowledge of English as a foreign language (EFL) is now a must for efficient and fruitful professional engagement in a worldwide economy. Learning English is actually essential for getting greater possibilities in a globalized environment because of its genuine global presence Crystal (2003), Cancino & Avila (2021). According to Mishra et al., (2020), the COVID-19 lockdown severely restricted academic program mobility and intercultural exchange, which gravely hampered the globalization of education. In this regard, there are many advantages to incorporating computer-assisted techniques into the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

According to Gonzalez (2020), online learning is described as learning that occurs online and is facilitated by electronic devices including tablets, smartphones, laptops, and PCs. Students are naturally lured to alternative online language learning options due to the extensive use of online learning Plaisance (2018). Online learning is also known as e-learning/virtual learning, which describes the use of technology, typically the internet, to transmit knowledge or conduct instruction Wang et al., (2010). Technology is used in online classes to facilitate interactive contact between lecturers and students. Many educational institutions around the world, including Saudi Arabia, decided for a switch from offline to online learning in order to endure the teaching learning process carefully and steadily as the COVID-19 pandemic expanded.

The learning processes of undergraduate EFL students were the subject of research by Rahaded et al. (2020). Despite the limited sample size, the findings demonstrate that WhatsApp helps students collaborate and develop their communication skills as they get ready for class while also promoting learning and problem-solving. There are undoubtedly both significant reasons in favor of and against the use of online communication in education. The Integrative approach, however, is the most logical and flexible theory surrounding e-learning in the EFL space to date Cundell (2008), Moore (2008) and Patronis (2008). Questions are emphasized by Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi (2017) as a powerful tool for encouraging prolonged classroom engagement. The information used in their study was carefully chosen from video recordings of EFL classes at Saudi Arabia with undergraduate English students. The effectiveness of interactions and feedback between teachers and students is a topic of Vattoy & Gamlem research (2020). According to academics, the caliber of the conversations and the questions are crucial signs of response give students confidence in their language proficiency. According to Beatty (2010), The computer

occasionally adopts roles outside of those of traditional learning resources and acknowledges that, despite its limitations, at least some of the functions of a teacher are reflected in its interactivity. This is especially true when using an independent computer. As a result, students have a great opportunity to decide what to study and how to acquire it, frequently influenced by their innate feelings and learning objectives.

The researcher's claim that inadequate training is caused by a lack of instructor confidence is supported by studies Ekberg & Gao (2018) and Hashemi & Kew (2021). In other words, better online communicative training encourages users to feel more at ease using information and communication technology (ICT) in the instruction of the English language. The results also demonstrate that individuals with effective training and skills in using online communication have an impact on the atmosphere of their classrooms, where students are more interactive and participate more actively than those who still struggle due to a lack of adequate training in this area.

Arabic, which is spoken by more than 118 million people and is the official language of Saudi Arabia, is the fifth-most-spoken language among L1 speakers (Crystal, 1997). In the Saudi Arabian context, previous studies have analyzed the English as a foreign language (EFL) students' perception of online interaction or communication (Alamir, 2015; Alqahtani, 2015; Kadwa, 2012). However, no studies have yet determined the KAP towards online communication in EFL among ELP students in Saudi Arabia, especially using SEM. Hence, this study aims to reveal how structural equation modeling (SEM) can be used to measure the adequacy of the variables included in the knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) model toward online communication in EFL

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Design

An exploratory study was conducted with 112 female undergraduate English language program (ELP) students for the academic year (2022-23) at the King Khalid University (KKU) of Saudi Arabia. An online survey was conducted from the student. This quantitative design was useful since it can be carried out using a series of standardized questions and is a great way to find out about a specific sample's knowledge, attitude, and practice Nardi (2018).

2.2 Respondents

A total of 112 female KKU students in Saudi Arabia pursuing undergraduate degrees in English took part in the survey.

2.3 Instrument

The students were provided with the link to the Google Form where the questionnaire was housed so they may respond. There are three components to this questionnaire. KAP level of students' online communication in EFL in sections A,C, and C. In the survey, a 15-item questionnaire comprising 5 items each on a 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Agree-5, Agree-4, Neutral-3, Disagree-2, and Strongly Disagree-1) was created to assess the KAP of the participants. The investigation was carried out utilizing a quantitative methodology Hofstee (2006) and Nunan (1992).

The Knowledge questionnaire are; a) Communicating in English is not important (K1), b) It is important for students to know how to use internet (K2), c) Internet should not be used for Lecturing (K3), d) Communicating with my Lecturer online benefits me (K4), e) Keep in touch with my classmates via the internet (K5). Attitude questionnaire are; a) I like studying English (A1), b) I Like to communicate with all subject Lecturer via the internet (A2), c) I like to communicate with my English Lecturer via the internet (A3), d) Students should not be allowed to communicate with teachers online (A4), e) English learning should start from the first grade in College (A5). Questionnaire on Practice are; a) I will use English during and after my studies (P1), b) Feeling more motivated to participate in online lecture (P2), c) Helps me to discover my online communication problems (P3), d) No difference in classroom and online lecture (P4), e) More time to speak in online Lecture rather than in classroom (P5).

2.4 Data Analysis

The data was subjected to analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 (Chicago, II, USA). Cronbach Alpha was used to measure the degree of internal consistency in the questionnaire and SEM through Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 5.0, was used to explore the 15 items of questionnaire, George & Mallery (2003).

2.5 Description

Table 1. Descriptive and Reliability statistics

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge	05	0.847	3.78	0.521
Attitude	05	0.770	3.90	0.606
Practice	05	0.716	3.70	0.618
Overall	15	0.827	3.79	0.464

3. Findings and Discussion

Reviewing the reliability of the KAP, Cronbach's alpha (α) values found 0.847, 0.770 and 0.716, respectively. For Attitude and Practice the Cronbach's alpha value >0.7 been rated Acceptable. Knowledge and overall score observed the Cronbach's alpha value of >0.80 being graded as Good, Jain & Angural (2017). Hence, it is revealed the proposed study is a reliable tool to assess KAP online communication in EFL between students. Besides, all variables of KAP indicated the mean score range from 3.70-3.90. The mean score of all items of fifteen

variables was found to be 3.79 (Table 1).

The mean score of knowledge found in this study is (3.78) which is lower than attitude, interestingly the Cronbach alpha score was high in knowledge (0.847) than attitude and practice. According to Rogers (2003), knowledge of technology is viewed as an important variable in online technology that affects other variables like attitude, perceived value of online communication, and behavioral intention to use ICT. This statement shows how well the Diffusion of Innovations theory fits into research. The mean score of attitude in this study found (3.90) which is higher than the knowledge and practice. This finding is consistent with studies done in Thailand, Hau & Sheu (2008) and Turkey, Aydin (2007) which found that young adults who used a specific learning website had very favorable perceptions toward online education. According to Hu et al., (2021), language class boredom is a significant addition to the newly emerging field of emotion research on foreign language learning. According to Saito et al., (2018), learners' individual experiences have an impact on how they view the educational process. Through several years of formal schooling, learners' attitudes are established. As expected mean score of practice (3.70) was low than Knowledge and Practice, in addition the Cronbach alpha value (0.716) was also low. As expected online EFL teaching among students need more practice which was supported by the research from AbuSeileek (2006) and Yang (2011).

3.1 SEM for KAP

To evaluate the suitability of the KAP model based on the collected samples, SEM analysis was done. In Figure 1, the KAP model is displayed with the covariance values for all the observed variables. A positive link between each item and each variable is discovered while analyzing the suggested model, varying from 0.924 to 0.971 (p<0.05) (Table 2). Each component of a variable is assumed to be positively connected to the variable to which it corresponds. Additionally, the results of the model fit indices showed a chi-square value of 160.856 and the following characteristics, i.e., degrees of freedom (df)=87, p=0.000. It is determined that this chi-square value (160.856) is significant (p<0.05). The chi-square value in SEM cannot be the only measure of model fit according to Teo et al., (2013).

Additionally, the proposed model's observed relative chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) is 2.849, which is between the 2–5 range that is considered to be acceptable, Paswan (2009). The model was also assessed using other model-fit metrics, including the Goodness of fit index (GFI=0.934) value observed greater than the suggested value 0.90, which suggests a good fit for the model (Byrne, 2009), The observed value of Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI=0.971) is greater than the suggested value of 0.80 supports to the fit of the model, Comparative fit index (CFI=0.950), Normed fit index (NFI=0.924), the NFI value found greater than the suggested value 0.90 which fits the model, refer Byrne (2009) and Kline (2011), Incremental fit index (IFI=0.965) the observed IFI value found greater than 0.95 which support the model fit, Tucker-lewis index (TLI=0.962), which is greater than 0.95 and is also supports the model fit, refer Schreiber et al., (2006) and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA=0.044) which is less than 0.05, hence the value is accepted, Teo et al.,(2013). Table 3 provides a summary of the model fit indices' results. With the exception of the chi-square value, all model fit indices met their respective suggested values, demonstrating the proposed model's suitability for the data observed.

Table 2. Model fit indices

SEM Model fit	Observed value	Suggested value
Chi-square	160.856 (p<0.05)	P>0.05
CMIN/DF	2.849	2 to 5
Goodness of fit index	0.934	≥0.90
Adjusted goodness of fit index	0.971	≥0.80
Comparative fit index	0.950	≥0.90
Normed fit index	0.924	≥0.90
Incremental fit index	0.965	≥0.95
Tucker-Lewis index	0.962	≥0.95
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	0.044	<0.05

In agreement with these findings, a study used SEM analysis to look into the predictors of active online learning in the cutting-edge learning environment. Active online learning has been found to be favorably impacted by "intelligent engagement," "personalization," "real-time feedback," "perceived simplicity of use," and "usefulness of technology" (Wang et al., 2021). Another study found that students' perceptions of online learning were influenced by engagement, motivation, academic integrity, and perceived usefulness (Bui et al., 2021). According to Muzammil et al(2020) .'s research, student participation had a favorable impact on how satisfied they were with online learning. Few research have suggested that students' perceptions of their learning outcomes are an important predictor of their happiness with online learning (Marks et al., 2005).

Instead of attending classes on campus, students can study remotely, which may reduce the need for travel to higher education institutions. Thus, using the internet for online learning cuts down on the student's travel time (Versteijlen et al., 2021). More responsibility and effort are required for online learning. Focusing while studying at home is difficult since the students lack peers with whom to discuss what they are learning and ask for clarification (Avila, 2020). Therefore, in order to increase the success of online learning during the COVID-19 epidemic, information technology must be used (Kumalawati et al., 2021). The consistency of the behaviors made possible by digital platforms like Blackboard further supported online teaching and learning. As a result, Blackboard, the most widely used e-learning platform, is utilized by Saudi HEIs. Using continuous communication tools, this instructional strategy offers a more customizable experience (Alshaikh et al., 2021).

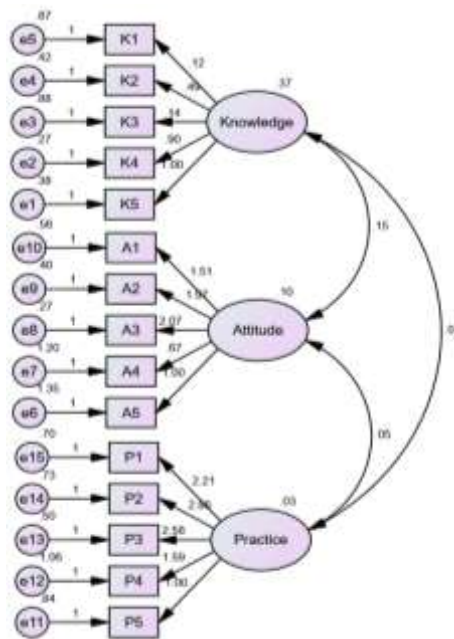


Figure 1. KAP of students towards online communication in EFL

4. Conclusion

Using the SEM analysis, it is concluded that the proposed KAP model is fit enough to assess the students' towards online communication in EFL. The findings of this study illustrate what students who are studying English has the knowledge, Attitude, and practice about online communication in EFL. These variables enable the researcher to assess the students' towards online communication in EFL, thereby developing suitable strategies to enhance the quality and success online communication in EFL. Future research should therefore concentrate more on the difficulties that professors and students encounter when utilizing synchronous and asynchronous online communication systems. Therefore, this study urges future researchers to concentrate on a particular learning platform that is widely used by English Language learners throughout Saudi Arabia so that the data obtained can be more precise. This will help policy makers at the Ministry level of HEI identify the limitations and further improve the education system as well as the educational platforms that are currently being used. Additionally, the study was restricted to KKU students taking English courses. To generalize the study's findings throughout all of Saudi Arabia, more research needs to be done.

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