Children’s use of technology for learning English

Conference or Workshop Item

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Version: Version of Record

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Children’s use of technology for learning English in Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal and Sudan

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What is known about children’s use of (mobile) technology for learning English

But...:
There are still many gaps in knowledge, e.g.
- How does mobile learning fit with classroom learning?
- How are mobile devices used informally?

Mobile devices are **not as cheap, reliable, safe, and easily available** as we like to think they are!

Teachers and learners are **not as proficient at using technology effectively** as we like to think they are!
Our research on children’s use of technology and the English language

Literature review (2020-21) showed a lack of research relating to:

- low-income/ under-resourced countries
- marginalised communities
- children’s opinions and experiences, both in school and outside of school
- teachers’ and parents’ perspectives
Project 2021-22

Reaching out to marginalised young people aged 13-15 in under-resourced countries in Africa and Asia

Partners:
- Universities
- Schools
- Field researchers

Participants:
- Children
- Teachers
- Parents

Focus on:
- mobile technologies & English language learning and use
- lived experience, inside and outside of school
- barriers and opportunities, including role of gender

https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/REMALIC/
The Research Team

- **The Open University** Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, Saraswati Dawadi, Mark Gaved
- **Tribhuvan University, Nepal**: Kamal Raj Devkota
- **University of Dhaka, Bangladesh**: Rubina Khan
- **Ahfad University for Women, Sudan**: Amna Bedri
- **Regional Centre of Teacher Training, Diourbel, Senegal**: Abdou Niane
- **Monash College, Australia** Ram Ashish Giri

Each partner in the 4 fieldwork countries also has their own research team.
Understanding educational marginalisation

MARGINALISATION: Processes that place certain people and communities on the margins of society, preventing them from accessing resources, opportunities and services, and from developing their capabilities

(von Braun & Gatzweiler, 2014)

Children’s inability to access, participate in, benefit from and/or complete their education, due to:

• poverty, gender, geographic location, disability, cultural practices, being in an ethnic minority, or having a mother tongue that is different from the languages used at school
School settings in marginalised communities

Four schools in each country (two rural and two urban)

Participants = 256 in total
- Students: 160 (40 from each country)
- Parents: 64 (16 form each country)
- Teachers: 32 (8 from each country)
(equal number of participants from rural and urban settings)

Sudan - Suburbs of Omdurman (inhabited mostly by war-displaced people) and white Nile (tribes such as nomads and Hausa)

Bangladesh - slum children (urban area) and Bandearban - remote part of the country where the literacy rate is 34.0%

Senegal - Taïba Moutoupha and Ndindy, where the GER for girls is the lowest, and the dropout rate for both girls and boys the highest

Nepal - Squatter community (urban setting), and Tharu ethnic community in rural location
Research Questions

ACCESS AND ATTITUDES

❖ What access do marginalised students, teachers and parents have to technology that may be used for educational purposes?

❖ What are marginalised students’, teachers’ and parents’ attitudes towards the role of technology and the English language?

EXPERIENCES

❖ What are the experiences of students, teachers, and parents in using technology for student learning?

❖ What are the experiences of students, teachers, and parents in using English for student learning?

STRATEGIES

❖ What strategies do the students, teachers, and parents suggest that can be employed to reduce marginalisation and provide better opportunities for learning?
Methodology

- **Qualitative design** to collect lived experiences of students, teachers and parents – *focus group discussions, interviews, classroom observations*

- Looking at issues from marginalised students’, parents’ and teachers’ perspectives, *giving them a voice* rather than making assumptions about them (Missou, 2012)

- **Data analysis guided by Activity Theory** (Engstrom, 1999) – tools, rules, contradictions...
Research findings
Attitudes towards the English language

- Job opportunities
- Can talk with people from other countries
- Going abroad (for study or job)
- Using technology
- Social prestige
- Daily life (information, travel, shopping, etc.)

**Students:**

*We need English in every aspect (NP).*

*In order to achieve something greater in life English is a must (BD)*

*Understanding English allows us to get good grades in class (SN)*

*If you know the English language then that means you’re awesome (SD)*

**Teachers:**

*Having no knowledge of English language represents a huge challenge for me when it comes to the use of technology (SD)*

**Parents:**

*When someone speaks English beside Bangla, people thinks him smart (BD)*
Attitudes towards technology

- Facilitates learning & teaching
- Better job opportunities
- Better life opportunities

Students:

Because many of us cannot use technology such as computers, and students must know how to use those because at a certain level you will need them (SN)

Crucially, technology does create a better opportunity in life for everyone (SN)

Teachers:

Technology creates better life opportunities for me and for others (SD)

- Students recognised that gaining the skills to effectively use devices is important.
- Some teachers, parents and students expressed some negative attitudes towards technology and its possible misuses.
Experiences of using technology at home

**Students:**

**Home assignments:** He [brother] allows me to use mobile phone for preparing assignments (BD)

**Online classes from home:** I use it in an online class (NP)

**Learning improvement:** I use google search. To improve the English language I search for ‘how to learn the English language’ on YouTube. For solving maths I downloaded apps (NP)

**Other uses:** listening to English songs/music, using social media [Facebook, TikTok, YouTube]

**Parent:** They work together. Students, for example, have WhatsApp groups through which they carry out work together. I noticed that (P-SN).

**Challenges:** sharing technology, connectivity
Access to devices and networks varied, with some children having their own devices, others borrowing from family members, and some drawing on extended social networks for internet connections.

Where schools have a small computer lab with desktop computers, use of the lab was often infrequent, and students shared computers.

**Students:**

*We have a computer lab but we did not use it during the time of pandemic. Before the pandemic, our teachers would take us to the lab. He used to demonstrate us different things in the computer subject (NP).*
Gender equality in using technology and learning English

Mixed Findings

Students:
Both boys and girls have the same opportunity to learn the English language (SN)

Boys get phone but girls are deprived. At present, many girls get to use phone but the number is less comparing to boys. They don’t give the phone to girls. What if we do bad things (BD)

Basically, we do not allow them, girls, to share technology with us (SD)

Parents:

The environment for women has changed now. So the prevailing discrimination has been eliminated to a great extent. In this case, my son and daughter both are equal (BD)

Teachers:

In the case of girls, usually guardians do not want to give mobile phones. Mobiles have negative contents. About all of the boys use mobile phones (BD)

It's the girls who are more interested in new technologies. And I think they have more opportunities to get the technology tools (SN)

Girls are one step ahead now. Presence in class, performances they are ahead one step. Old days are gone (BD)
Some important findings

Challenges
Lack of access to digital devices and the internet - most students do not own any digital devices. They have to share devices with their parents and/or siblings at home.

Strict rules around technology use both at home and schools

Low proficiency in English and low digital literacy

Gender roles
Gender inequality in terms of access to technology at home exists in some families for social reasons

Parents are more concerned about how their daughters use technology than their sons

Girls and boys use technology for different purposes

Female students are perceived to be usually more motivated to learn English than boys
Use of English for student learning

**Home language:** No use of English (mostly local/national languages)

**Languages in schools:** Mostly national/local languages, some English

**Students:**

*In an English class, sometimes we speak English, sometimes we speak French or Wolof* (SN)

*Although I also like English, there is none at home who can teach me English* (BD)

*They use Bangla more while teaching English in classroom* (BD)

*Teacher explains in Arabic in all lessons and sometimes speaks in English* (SD)

**Teachers:**

*I use multiple languages, English, Nepali and sometimes Tharu* (NP)

**Parents:**

*Nowadays, everyone prefers children to be taught in their local languages at school. Maybe it would be much easier for them... In any case, I would have liked my children to learn their local language at school* (SN)
Impact related work

**Research partners** in each country are working with 2-4 other organisations (e.g. NGOs, national Teacher Associations) to disseminate findings and organise teacher training etc.

**Other partners/ representatives:** British Council, Ministries of Education, Education Training Centres

- Producing policy briefs
- Policy brief dissemination and workshops for key stakeholders
- Training of trainers/ Teacher training
- Press releases
- Blog post/reposted in SNS sites
- Radio programs/interviews
Some implications of our findings

- It’s important to ensure that national/regional/school policies and provision are in place so that children have equitable access to technology and the English language.

- The findings that young boys and girls use technology for different purposes may have classroom implications; teachers could consider such differences when devising tasks for students.

- Identify the root causes that demotivate boys from learning and having high aspirations for the future; schools and parents may need to work together.
Our new project with a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

**Digital/mobile learning and the future of English in Higher Education in South East Asia (2022-24)**

- **Focus on emerging ‘trends’** - such as digital/mobile English learning and informal learning
- **Collecting perceptions and experiences** from students, teachers, policy makers, I/NGO leaders, IT companies, educationists
- **Drawing out implications** for pedagogy, policy and research

Supported by

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English for the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) generation

**BRITISH COUNCIL**
Thank you!

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