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**DIGITAL TOOLS FOR STUDENTS ENHANCED COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE  
21ST CENTURY**

**BY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Effective communication is essential in all types of relationships, whether personal, professional, or temporary interactions. It serves as a fundamental element for teaching and learning, facilitating constant interaction and connection between teachers and students. In the 21st century, communication is a pivotal component of the 4Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) of learning. Teachers strive to enhance students' communication skills through experimentation, practice, and a diverse range of techniques. However, the methods and resources for teaching communication skills in educational settings can vary based on the instructional approach and the mode of communication. Digital tools encompass programmes, websites, or online resources that streamline various tasks. Additionally, digital tools and resources encompass word processing documents and slide presentation software, many of which are accessible via web browsers without requiring downloads, allowing for seamless access in the house and at school. The effective implementation of online learning tools in classrooms not only enhances student communication and aids teachers in refining their lesson plans but also facilitates personalized learning, thereby fostering the development of crucial 21st-century skills. This research article aims to address several key questions related to enhancing students' communication skills through digital tools. These questions include identifying which digital tools can improve communication, limitations for effective use of the digital tools, students' difficulties in communication, and strategies for the integration and adaptation of digital tools in the teaching of communication skills.

**Keywords: Digital tools, Communication skills, Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication, and 21st Century Learning Skills.**

### **Introduction**

Communication is essential for any relationship, whether personal, professional, or transient interactions. Individuals engage in communication consciously or subconsciously, striving to enhance and refine their communication through experimentation, practice, and a diverse array of techniques. However, the methods and tools of communication are subjective, varying based

on the individual, circumstances, and mode of communication. What may be effective in oral communication or rhetoric might not yield the same results in written communication, and vice versa. Ultimately, communication is a process aimed at assigning and conveying meaning to foster shared understanding among individuals. The widespread adoption of digital technology tools by educators has significantly enhanced the classroom environment. A multitude of applications, software, and platforms primarily focus on fostering communication, promoting collaboration, actively engaging students, and facilitating curriculum development across various learning settings. Both teachers and students utilize social media, online games, multimedia, and mobile apps to interact and supplement the learning experience. Additionally, programs for editing digital content and platforms such as Office 365 and Google Suite play a crucial role in supporting collaboration and resource sharing. These digital tools offer a means to incorporate text, images, audio, and video, creating an immersive and interactive learning experience. Furthermore, popular digital classroom tools such as Chrome books, tablets, and Airtime devices are widely utilized to enrich the educational journey. This research article aims to address several key questions related to enhancing students' communication skills through digital tools. These questions include identifying which digital tools can improve communication, strategies for maximising their effectiveness, considerations for simultaneous use of multiple tools, judicious utilisation of these tools, the influence of the communication medium on specific tools or techniques, and methods for educators to instill the use of digital tools for more impactful communication.

### **Rationale of the Paper**

The rationale for this paper is rooted in the recognition of the pivotal importance of effective communication skills in the 21st century and the need to address the gap in understanding how digital tools can contribute to the development and refinement of students' communication skills. By delving into the impact of digital tools on communication skills, the paper aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in the field of education, as well as to offer practical recommendations for the strategic integration of digital tools in educational curricula to optimise students' communication skill development in the contemporary digital age. Overall, the paper seeks to contribute to the discourse on innovative educational practices and the cultivation of essential competencies for the 21st century.

### **Aim/objectives**

The aim of the paper "Digital Tools for Students' Enhanced Communication Skills in the 21st Century" is to make bare the impact of digital tools on students' communication abilities and to provide practical recommendations for the strategic integration of digital tools in educational curricula to optimise students' communication skill development in the contemporary digital age. The objective is to assess the specific ways in which digital tools, such as video creation platforms, collaborative writing software, and interactive presentation tools, impact students' verbal, written and visual communication skills in educational settings. Also, to provide practical recommendations for educators and policymakers on the effective integration of digital tools into educational curricula to enhance students' communication skill development, thereby preparing them for effective communication in the digital age.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Definition of the concept Communication**

Communication is the exchange of information, ideas, thoughts, and emotions through verbal, nonverbal, or written channels. It includes both the sending and receiving of messages between individuals or groups to establish mutual understanding. Successful communication involves components such as attentive listening, articulate expression, empathy, and response, and it holds significant importance in personal, professional, and educational settings. According to Adler and Rodman (1997), p. 3 [1], communication is the process by which a person reacts to the symbolic behaviour of another person. It is the process of using a medium to transfer information from a sender to a recipient so that both parties understand the information in the same way (Rubin, 1988 [19]).

The meaning of communication varies considerably based on the source, with some emphasising the role of the communicator, others focusing on the message, and yet others focusing on the medium of communication. For instance, McLuhan (1964) thought that the way something is communicated is as important as the message itself. This is different from what Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) believed. They said that the meaning of a message comes from how people understand the content and the relationship between them. Verderber (1978) had another idea: he said that the person sending the message is the one who decides what it means, and the person receiving the message has to understand it based on that.

#### **21st Century Learning Skills**

According to the paper produced as part of a collaborative project by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), it identifies the 4 Cs as learning and innovation skills. These skills are frequently mentioned as essential in discussions about 21st-century skills. They are increasingly acknowledged as distinguishing factors between students who are equipped for the progressively intricate challenges of life and work in the 21st century and those who are not.

- Critical thinking and problem solving, for instance, proficiently scrutinising and assessing evidence, arguments, claims, and beliefs; solving various types of unfamiliar problems using both traditional and inventive approaches.
- Communication, for instance, expressing thoughts and ideas effectively through oral and written communication in diverse forms and contexts
- Collaboration, for instance, demonstrates the ability to work proficiently and respectfully within diverse teams.
- Creativity and innovation, for instance, employ a broad array of idea-generation techniques to produce new and valuable ideas. Communication Skills: Saunders and Mills (1999) define communication skills as the transmission of a message that involves mutual understanding within the context of communication.

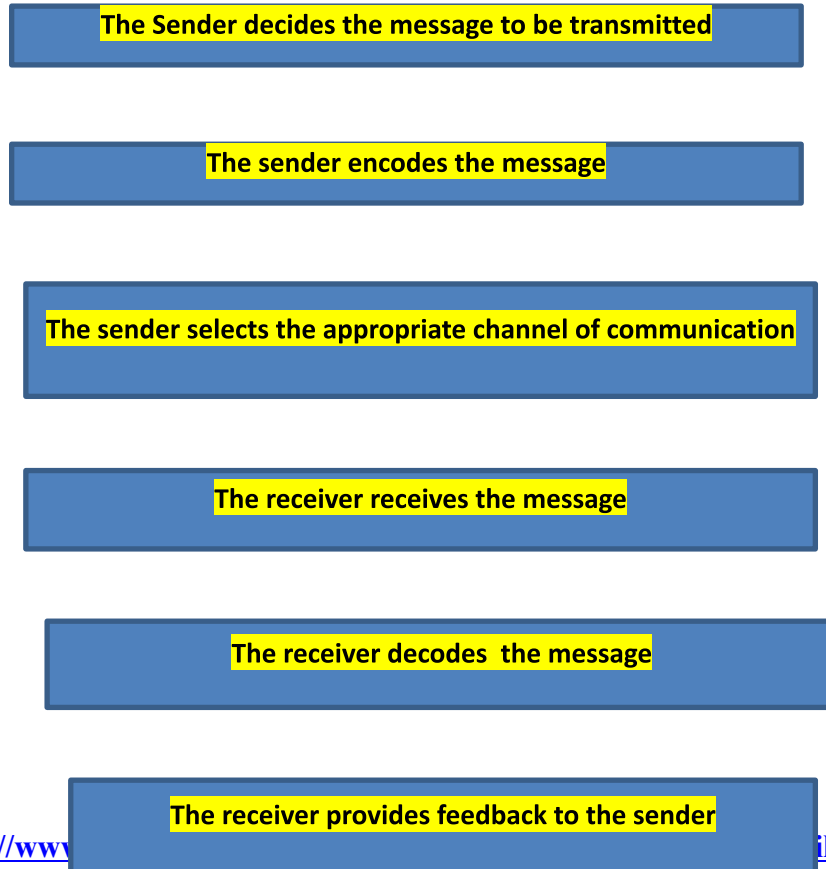
Additionally, McCarthy and Carter (2001) emphasize the significance of teacher communication skills in the delivery of education to students. Communication skills encompass listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all of which are essential for effective teaching.

According to Freddie Silver, teachers proficient in communication can simplify and enhance understanding. Effective communication skills are vital for teachers in conveying educational content, managing the classroom, and engaging with students. Sng Bee (2012) highlights the importance of teachers adopting communication skills that inspire students' learning processes and accommodate diverse thinking approaches.

### **Communication as a Process**

The communication process involves transmitting information from one individual to another (Wyer, R. S., & Shrum, L. J. 2015). This comprises the sender's decision to convey messages to the receiver, followed by the sender encoding the data using a suitable channel. Subsequently, the

receiver receives the encoded data and decodes it to comprehend the intended information. These sequential steps depict the process of communication, as illustrated in the accompanying figure.



Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338111111/figure/fig/1/figure-fig1/1527041111111/Elements\\_of\\_the\\_process\\_of\\_communication\\_are\\_Nordquist\\_R\\_2019.png](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338111111/figure/fig/1/figure-fig1/1527041111111/Elements_of_the_process_of_communication_are_Nordquist_R_2019.png) [ills A Review](#)  
Elements of the process of communication are ( Nordquist, R. 2019). The above flowchart shows the process of communication between sender and receiver

**Sender:** The sender decides the message to be transmitted as well as encodes the message. The sender selects the appropriate channel of communication. The receiver receives the message. The receiver decodes the message. The receiver provides feedback to the sender. This message can take various forms, such as a concept, an idea, an image, a symbol, a report, a command, or even a simple smile.

**Message:** The message encompasses the information conveyed through various mediums, including speeches, articles, signs, photographs, or symbols, depending on the context and the nature of the data to be communicated. It is at the heart of the communication process, serving as the vehicle for the exchange of information.

**Encoder:** Encoder encoding involves the selection of a suitable medium for the intended message, considering the context, space, and nature of the communication, whether verbal or non-verbal. The sender transmits the message to the intended recipient in the form of symbols, photographs, or text.

**Channels :** Channels refer to the method or pathway through which communication occurs. The message is transmitted through a channel connecting the sender to the recipient. This can be through vocal or written means, utilizing tools such as notepads, computers, telephones, cell phones, applications, or television.

**Verbal and nonverbal communication:** The process of communication between teachers and students involves both verbal and nonverbal elements. Verbal communication encompasses the use of words and sentences to convey information and ideas. However, nonverbal communication includes nonverbal indicators including posture, body language, and facial emotions. Research by Valentzas & Broni, as cited in Nurani & Ade (2017), suggests that the combined use of verbal and nonverbal communication can enhance students' comprehension and understanding of communication.

### **Digital tools for Communication**

Digital tools for communication are software applications or platforms that utilise technology to facilitate various tasks, functions, or processes. These tools can encompass a wide range of applications, including communication, collaboration, content creation, organisation, and data analysis. Examples of digital tools include learning management systems (LMS), video conferencing platforms, document editors, presentation software, project management tools, and educational apps designed to support teaching and learning. They refer to technologies that enable people to access, gather, manipulate, and communicate. Digital cameras, e-readers, e-learning platforms, social media platforms, gaming consoles, and even digital artwork are among them. Examples of digital tools that enhance communication skills include: video conferencing platforms: tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet facilitate face-to-face communication, virtual meetings, and remote collaboration. Email and Messaging Apps: Platforms such as Gmail, Outlook, Slack, or Microsoft Teams enable written communication, file sharing, and real-time messaging. Collaboration Software: Applications like Google Workspace, Microsoft Office 365, or Trello support collaborative document editing,

project management, and team communication. Social Media Platforms: Tools like Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook can be used for professional networking, sharing information, and engaging in public communication. Presentation Software: Platforms such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi aid in creating and delivering effective presentations to convey information and ideas.

There are also technological resources that can aid in language learning, These technological tools can enrich communication between educators and students, fostering a dynamic and interactive learning atmosphere. They include: Learning Management Systems (LMS): Platforms such as Google Classroom, Canvas, or Schoology enable educators to distribute resources, offer feedback, and communicate with students and parents. Communication Apps: Tools like Remind, ClassDojo, or Bloomz facilitate direct messaging with students and parents, along with the sharing of announcements and updates. Video Conferencing: Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet allow for virtual face-to-face communication, thereby supporting remote learning and personalised assistance. Collaborative Tools: Applications like Padlet, Flipgrid, or Jamboard encourage interactive communication through collaborative discussions, video responses, and virtual brainstorming. Interactive Whiteboards: Resources like SMART Learning Suite or Promethean ActivInspire provide interactive platforms for content sharing, student engagement, and real-time participation. All these digital tools offer diverse means of communication, enabling individuals to interact, collaborate, and convey information effectively in various professional and educational contexts.

### **Difficulty in students' communication**

A new language is first met, understood, practiced, and learned through the medium of spoken language. In a school setting, the spoken form serves as the primary source of language instruction. The active use of language to express meaning is known as communication. Communication skill instruction, according to Basavarajaiah (2016), has been underestimated for a long time. Students' communicative skills should be improved as a means of assisting them in expressing themselves and adhering to the appropriate social and cultural rules for each situation. The vast majority of English students are still unable to communicate in English orally. For a variety of reasons, including the repetition of uninteresting subjects and exercises as well as the use of traditional materials and approaches, students are unmotivated and pay less attention to the oral course.

### **Limitation to the effective use of digital tools to teach communication skills**

1. **Access and Equity:** Disparities in access to technology and digital tools among students can create unequal learning opportunities, affecting the effectiveness of using digital tools for teaching communication skills (Warschauer, 2004).
2. **Technical Challenges:** Technical issues such as internet connectivity problems, software glitches, or device compatibility issues can disrupt the learning process and hinder the effective use of digital tools (Hsu, 2017).
3. **Pedagogical Training:** Educators may lack sufficient training or professional development in integrating digital tools effectively into language teaching to enhance communication skills (Chai et al., 2017).
4. **Authentic Communication:** Overreliance on digital tools may hinder opportunities for authentic face-to-face communication and language interaction, impacting the development of communication skills (Thorne, 2008).

### **Strategies for integration and adoption of digital tools:**

1. **Blended Learning Approach:** Integrating digital tools with traditional teaching methods creates a blended learning environment that enhances communication skills (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).
2. **Scaffold Use of Tools:** Providing structured guidance and support to students while using digital tools for communication tasks, gradually increases the complexity of tasks as skills develop as such it enhances creativity.
3. **Authentic Tasks:** Designing communication tasks that simulate real-world contexts and encouraging meaningful language use and interaction through digital tools (Warschauer, 1996).
4. **Teacher Professional Development:** Offering training and support for educators to effectively integrate digital tools into communication skill development (Ertmer et al., 2012).
5. **Learner Autonomy:** Empowering students to use digital tools for self-directed language learning and communication practice (Benson, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework for the Integration and Adoption of Digital Tools**

The use of digital tools to enhance communication skills among students can be supported by various educational theories. These theories provide a theoretical framework for understanding the benefits of using digital tools to enhance communication skills and can guide educators in effectively integrating technology into language learning and communication instruction. Here are a few theories that provide a foundation for integrating digital tools into communication skills.

**Constructivism:** This theory, which was made popular by theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, places a strong emphasis on cooperative learning, active learning, and the social creation of knowledge. Digital tools can facilitate collaborative learning experiences, allowing students to engage in meaningful communication and knowledge construction (Jonassen, 1999).

**Connectivism:** This modern learning theory, proposed by George Siemens, focuses on the impact of technology on learning and knowledge acquisition. It emphasises the role of digital tools and networked learning environments in fostering connections and enhancing communication skills in the digital age (Siemens, 2005).

**Sociocultural Theory:** Developed by Vygotsky, this theory underscores the importance of social interaction and cultural context in learning. Digital tools can provide platforms for students to engage in authentic communication, collaborate with peers, and interact with diverse cultural perspectives (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

**Multiliteracies Theory:** This theory, associated with the New London Group, recognises the diverse forms of communication in contemporary society, including digital and multimedia literacies. It advocates for the integration of digital tools to develop students' communication skills across multiple modes and media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

### **Previous Related Research**

To complement the theory described, previous research by Kocaman (2016) conducted a study entitled "Communication Barriers that Junior and Senior ELT Students Experience in the Process of Learning a Foreign Language." The aim of this study was to identify the communication barriers encountered by junior and senior ELT (English Language Teaching) students during the foreign language learning process. The research collected data from 36 undergraduate students through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and open questions. The results of the study revealed that students encountered emotional, language, and perceptual barriers during the process of learning a foreign language. Emotional barriers included anxiety (36%) and

motivation (22%), the most commonly felt obstacles. Language barriers encompassed native language interference (22%) and vocabulary knowledge (22%) as significant challenges. Additionally, perceptual barriers were reflected in material (17%) and teacher-related (33%) obstacles. Notably, the study did not yield significant results concerning cultural barriers. This research provides valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by junior and senior ELT students in the context of communication barriers during foreign language learning.

### **Conclusion:**

One of the most crucial talents to develop and improve is communication skills. Digital tools allow teachers and students to communicate and provide comprehensible input and output. They help students and teachers become more confident and student-centred in their studying and teaching. Teachers are just now realising the potential of Web 2.0 tools and upcoming social software apps for developing communication skills. Teachers could employ online resources for self-directed learning to more effectively teach communication skills. Learning may be made more active, motivating, and learner-centered with the right use of tools. Audio-video, podcasts, video clip tools, and virtual worlds are examples of online resources that can make learning more engaging. The next generation will almost certainly continue to be on the cutting edge of technological advancement.

### **Suggestions**

The following are the suggestions for the integration and adoption of digital tools for students' enhanced communication skills in the 21st century:.

1. Integrated Language Arts Curriculum for the promotion of language arts throughout different subjects to strengthen communication skills in diverse settings. This cross-curricular approach may encompass collaborative writing ventures in science, historical deliberations in social studies, and persuasive speech exercises in mathematics.
2. Promotion of Digital Literacy for the establishment of programmes for digital literacy to empower students with the ability to effectively communicate in online settings. This will entail instructing responsible digital citizenship, online decorum, and the critical assessment of digital content.
3. Facilitation of Oratory Workshops: The Coordination of workshops or speech contests will afford students the chance to enhance their spoken communication skills within a nurturing

and constructive atmosphere. These sessions could concentrate on speech delivery, nonverbal cues, and persuasive methods.

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