"The Reality of Using "Madrasati Educational Platform" to Teach English Speaking Skills from Teachers' Point of View in Saudi Arabia"

(An Extracted Research Paper from Master's Thesis)

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Abstract:

This study examines English language teachers' point of view on the reality of using the Madrasati Educational Platform "MEP" to teach English speaking skills in Saudi Arabia. The study used a descriptive research design; data was gathered via a questionnaire, and 75 intermediate school English teachers participated. The findings asserted that the MEP has many advantages, such as class control, electronic resources, ease of student assessment, continuing learning, live chat, creating recordings, motivating students to learn and research, keeping up with apps, enhancing teacher-student communication, and finally increasing student responsibility towards learning. On the other hand, it faces some disadvantages, such as distracting students because of the absence of facial expressions, technical difficulties (cut-off audio during conversations or poor internet signal), limited teacher-student interactions, reduced speaking skills and direct feedback, and finally, difficulty recognizing student's vocabulary and grammar needs.

Keywords: Teaching speaking skills, Distance education, MEP, Online learning.

Introduction:

Achieving the goal of the educational system depends not only on the models and approaches of learning but on the tools to be used in delivering learning materials as well. There are two main tools for providing the content: traditional and technology tools. The main objective of educational technologies is to ease the completion of strategic tasks, predict academic development, and determine the educational methods and techniques that will be used in the educational process (Ivanchuk et al., 2020). Employing technology in the learning process can improve the education system output (Machmud et al., 2021). Integrating ICTs in delivering educational content has increased student satisfaction and engagement (Maphosa, 2021).

Varied technology tools have been used to achieve the desired objectives in teaching and learning English. They provide great opportunities to enhance the delivery of pedagogies (Mofareh, 2019). It is worth mentioning that ICT use in a foreign language helps provide a learning environment that is consistent with students' needs and learning styles (Saldarriaga & Carmona, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed different challenges on the traditional educational systems and forced policymakers to redesign their educational structures using innovative practices to ensure continuity of education. This has led to the emergence of educational platforms (Ospina et al., 2021). In the 21st century, platforms are regarded as the peak of digital development (Aldossry, 2021). During the last ten years, platforms have gained significant interest and become critical parts of human lives (Erarslan, 2019). In addition, social media can offer many platforms, such as wikis and blogs, that teachers can use in teaching English to improve the educational process (Banafi, 2016).

During the academic year 2020-2021, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has designed the Madrasati Educational Platform MEP as a new gateway to provide distance teaching and learning experiences for all students from 1st to 12th grades. It offers many supplemental educational tools that cover all school subjects (Aldossry, 2021). Although many researchers have confirmed the effectiveness of the Madrasti platform and its positive effects on the teaching and learning processes (Ospina et al., 2021; Alkinani & Alzahrani, 2021; Aldossry, 2021), specific challenges hinder the realization of its objectives, especially at the level of educators' training. Other challenges are related to the quality of the infrastructure and skills in dealing with educational platforms (Alsalim, 2021; Khanfar, 2020). There is a real need to evaluate the elements of this experience to ensure quality in distance education (Abu-Abaa, 2021). Alubthane (2021) has confirmed that there is an urgent need to evaluate the MP to improve areas of strengths, determine aspects of weaknesses, and develop its different processes to improve the quality of the distance education experience.

Many studies have been dedicated to investigating the effectiveness of using technology tools in teaching and learning English. However, only some studies have investigated the usability of technology in improving English language skills represented in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Kieu et al., 2021). Speaking is regarded as a critical skill for foreign language acquisition. Speaking touches on broad areas of language, such as pragmatics, functions, and social interaction (Kürüm, 2016). Türkben (2019) has revealed that interactive teaching strategies that depend on technology can significantly affect teaching and learning English speaking skills. Many researchers agree that digital educational technologies can enhance the teaching and learning of English-speaking skills (Kodrle & Savchenko, 2021). On the other hand, Kurt (2021) has confirmed

that the use of distance education has negatively affected students' speaking skills during the pandemic as they face difficulties expressing themselves verbally in online courses.

Although the official education system in Saudi Arabia demands the physical attendance of students, it also applies distance education through MP in an emergency. Thus, there is a need to examine and evaluate the application utilized in teaching speaking skills at a distance.

Research Problem

The problem of the current research is to explore the reality of using the "Madrasati Educational Platform" to teach English Speaking Skills from teachers' point of view in Saudi Arabia, from which the following questions arise:

1.   What are the advantages of using the "Madrasati Educational platform" in teaching English-speaking skills to intermediate school students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from teachers' point of view?

2.   What are the disadvantages of using the "Madrasati Educational platform" in teaching English-speaking skills to intermediate school students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from teachers' point of view?

Literature Review

MEP is an interactive platform that aims to provide internet technologies to promote students' learning experiences and enable them to learn and excel (Alsalim, 2021). Al-Thumali (2021) has stated that the MEP helps teachers manage their time better, which makes them feel satisfied with their teaching experiences. In a related context, Alkinani and Alzahrani (2021) have confirmed that teachers are happy with the MEP as it has a well-designed technical infrastructure. Also, the MEP has a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Teachers have positive perceptions and attitudes towards this platform because of the quality of its content. On the other hand, Shishah (2021) has shown that the MEP is inadequate and needs further improvement, especially regarding navigation issues. The advantages and disadvantages of using MEP in teaching may vary from one educational content and skill to another.

Learning English as a foreign language relies on four communication skills: listening, writing, reading, and speaking. Each skill plays a significant role in learning a language; however, speaking skills have a unique position among other language skills. This might be attributed to how it helps individuals express themselves (Vadivel & Ganesan, 2020). It is a critical skill that must be mastered while learning foreign or second languages (Rao, 2019).

Although learning speaking skills is crucial in new language acquisition, there are some difficulties associated with teaching English speaking skills; Oseno, Barasa, and Omulando (2014) have revealed that there are specific challenges represented by shortage of time, mother tongue interference, and many students in the classroom. Furthermore, Al-Hassaani and Qaid (2021) have confirmed that there are other challenges related to students' limited English background, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes.

Difficulties teaching speaking skills are not limited to regular classroom learning; teaching speaking skills through virtual classrooms encounters some obstacles. For instance, students' loss of confidence and communication during virtual sessions has made it much more difficult to say or utter the words correctly (Sayuti et al., 2020). Learners have difficulties expressing themselves because they are uncertain, reluctant, and afraid of making mistakes. Other challenges revolved around fear, hesitation, limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, and self-confidence (Ying, Siang, and Mohamad, 2021).

On the other hand, teaching English speaking skills online has some advantages; Rodrigues & Vethamani (2015) have revealed that English Proficiency in Conversation (EPiC) online learning program positively impacts students' speaking skills. Sritulanon, Chaturongakul, and Thammetar (2018) have confirmed that students were satisfied with distance courses for teaching English-speaking skills using videoconferencing technology. Also, when time and location constraints are considered, e-learning is the most effective technique for teaching and learning speaking abilities because teachers have easy access to a wealth of knowledge via various online resources.

Many previous studies addressed teaching English online for different purposes and showed various results related to the issue from different angles. For example, some studies highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of teaching English language skills online in comparison to face-to-face teaching; Post Raj Pokharel (2022), in their qualitative phase, involved teachers' perceptions, found that several new IT tools and pedagogical methods have upgraded students' overall skills, while the same time, have affected bonding with students that were taken for granted in the physical classroom. However, Al-Buhairi (2019) proved that teaching the English language via electronic platforms significantly increased interaction and communication between teachers and learners. Also, his study revealed teachers' beliefs that online learning helps present information more efficiently and faster. This is also asserted by Alqahtani (2022), who showed that while most teachers' initial response to online learning was negative, their views became more positive over time. It made marking homework faster, facilitated communication with school administrators and parents, and helped the personal development of teachers and pupils. Teachers and students benefit from online English learning. Al-Thubaiti and Al-Masaad's (2020) study showed that both students' cognitive and skills utilization were highly beneficial from electronic learning platforms in learning the English language. More illustrations, their study found no significant differences in improving either cognitive or skills utilization according to the variable of (age, gender, educational level, and nature of work). In addition to cognitive and learning skills, motivation to learn English was higher in online learning. Abu Suleiman (2019) found that student motivation was more elevated in online learning than face-to-face classroom teaching.

Just as previous studies showed some of the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching of the English language compared to traditional teaching, some studies explained some of the reasons. Aldossry's (2021) study discovered that the technological knowledge of teachers and students was one of the most essential elements of successful virtual classrooms. This was affirmed by Rubaai and Khatib's (2020) study, which revealed that all students see Google Classroom as easy to use and helpful in learning English. As a result, their attitudes were positive towards the Google Classroom platform.

Other studies focus on teaching speaking English skills online. Ying, Siang, and Mohamad (2021) reviewed the literature on ESL learners' challenges in learning speaking skills at a distance. According to their findings, the obstacles were related to fear, hesitancy, a restricted vocabulary, a lack of drive, and concerns with self-confidence. In contrast, Alzamil's (2021) results discovered that participants had positive attitudes toward the importance of speaking English and appreciated the benefits of online learning for teaching speaking skills. Still, they felt that it could not replace face-to-face learning.

Since the MEP is a national invention utilized in the urgent call for online learning during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, only some studies, as far as the researchers know, have addressed the MEP so far. Alqahtani's (2022) study concluded that the MEP provided self-education and learner autonomy and helped students acquire English outside the conventional face-to-face classrooms. In addition, Al-Hader & Almutairy (2022) found in their study that secondary students often do not face scientific and educational problems while using the e-learning "MEP" during the coronavirus pandemic, while the most notable technical problems such as repeated Internet interrupts during the learning process. Also, it showed that most students depend on virtual classes through MEP and the lack of communication of most teachers with students through MEP in addition to students' boredom during learning, limited study time, and cost-solving through MEP.

Speaking about teachers' qualifications in using the MEP, Al-Hamoud (2021), for example, evaluated the remote teacher training on using the MEP. The critical aspect found from the evaluation of teacher training was represented by the need for training courses on the use of the MEP to enhance teachers' educational experiences and competencies. Also, Shishah (2021) concluded in his study that the usability of the MEP for schoolteachers needed to be improved, and further improvement was required. One of the most frequently reported issues was the navigation issues.

Overall, current research benefited from previous studies in accurately diagnosing and treating the problem holistically. Among the aspects of the scientific benefit of earlier studies are formulating an accurate title, selecting the appropriate method, and developing the study instrument. The problem and significance were supported by the recommendations and suggestions of previous studies, especially the study of (Al-Buhairi, 2019), (Abu Suleiman, 2019), and (Al-Hamoud, 2021) in designing the research tool.

As far as the researchers know, the current research is characterized by being the first to show The Reality of Using the MEP in Teaching English-Speaking Skills to Intermediate School Students.

Research Methodology and Procedures

After reviewing previous research literature, a questionnaire was designed to serve the purpose of the current research. The questionnaire comprised 19 items within two main axes of the expected advantages and disadvantages of using the MEP in teaching English-speaking skills and applied a five-point Likert Scale.

Some arbitrators reviewed the questionnaire to ensure interrater validity, and their notes about the deletion, addition, and reformulation were applied. Also, the internal consistency validity was calculated, and the reliability of the research tool was verified by applying it twice in a two-week time span to a small group not participating in the research. The reliability factor was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha equation, which is found at (0.90).

While Nunnally (1978) recommends reliabilities of 0.70 or better (but not much beyond than 0.80) for basic research and between 0.90 and 0.95 in cases where important decisions are to be made on the basis of the test scores.

The research community is comprised of all intermediate school English language teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire was distributed in all open-access electronic educational communities of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, mainly through social media official accounts of intermediate schools. The number of responses was 75 after the invitations to participate in the questionnaire were published two months later.

Research Results and Discussion

The data retrieved from the questionnaire went through descriptive statistical analysis to answer the research questions; all research questions' results were presented, interpreted, and discussed in an integrated manner as follows:

First Question Results

1. What are the advantages of using the "Madrasati Educational platform" in teaching English-speaking skills to intermediate school students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia teachers' point of view?

	phrase	Strongly ag		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagr	
	I believe that the Madrasati platform …	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	offers a variety of technical options to en learning new vocabularies (e.g., multimedia, content).	27	38	42	54.4	6	8	0	0
2	facilitates assessment of students' fluency leve	17	24	36	48	19	25	3	4
3	saves teachers time when doing classroom tea tasks (e.g., enables the teacher to replay and r content and student performance.	26	35	37	48	11	15	1	1
4	promotes continuous learning (after the cla students' speaking skills.	16	23	37	48	20	26	2	2
5	provides students with many digital resour websites for teaching and practicing speaking	31	43	35	44	8	11	1	1
6	involves students in technology-based conversations (e.g., simulations, mobile phon	22	31	44	58	9	11	0	0
7	allows students to learn through techn individually or collaboratively.	24	33	41	53	10	13	0	0
8	helps students to create and exchange audio c (e.g., recorded conversations, audio, and vide	25	35	37	48	12	13	1	3.5

9	encourages students to search for sp vocabulary, synonyms, and meanings.	21	29	37	49	14	18	3	3.5
10	utilize digital applications (multimedia interactive) to improve students' vocabular pronunciation.	23	33	41	53	10	13	1	1
11	creates sustainable digital communities of pr (e.g., online, offline, quizzes, emails, indepe use).	27	38	36	46	11	30	1	2
12	improves students-teachers' vocal and w communication.	22	30	34	45	19	25	0	0
13	keeps students updated on speaking skills-r apps, podcasts, programs, and TV shows.	20	28	37	49	15	19	3	3.5
14	strengthens students' sense of responsibility to learning grammar and vocabulary.	22	32	41	53	9	12	3	4

(Table 1)

Interpretation and Discussion for First Question Results: As shown in (Table 1), teachers believe that MEP offers a variety of technical options to enhance the learning process, particularly in learning new vocabulary, which reached (92%) agreement. Teachers asserted that by their approval of some of MEP features, like the ability to exchange contents with a total of (83) agreements, enhancing learning with digital resources with a total of (87) agreements, and utilizing digital applications (such as multimedia and interactive applications) to improve students' pronunciation of vocabulary with a total of (89) agreements; providing students with many digital resources or websites for practicing speaking which reached more than (80%) agreements; and finally, involving students in technology-based life conversations (e.g., simulations, mobile phones) which reached more than (89) agreements. However, it is worth noting that while teachers believe MEP encouraging students to search for specific vocabulary, synonyms, and meanings has a high percentage at (78%), there were (21.5%) of teachers who disagree, and that might be because of students using their devices and phones to be active at social media and video games instead of taking the learning seriously, in addition to students might not have enough knowledge to search in the right way.

In addition, results show that continuous learning through the platform and students' interest in practicing speaking was positive, which reached (71%). Other responses could justify this: first, (32)-teachers strongly agree on MEP's ability to strengthen students' sense of responsibility toward learning grammar and vocabulary, and (38) teachers strongly agree that MEP creates sustainable digital communities of practice (e.g., online, offline, quizzes, emails, independent use); and (33) teachers strongly agree that MEP allows students to learn through technology individually or collaboratively; and (28) teachers strongly agree that MEP keeps students updated on speaking skills-related apps, podcasts, programs, and tv shows. However, Disagreement cannot be ignored in continuous learning, as it reached (28%). This may be because of the environment surrounding the student (such as noisy family members), which causes the student to be distracted and use their phones to play with their favorite games and social media sites.

Addressing the advantages of MEP in teaching speaking skills, teachers' responses show high agreement on some related items such as: first, facilitates assessment of students' fluency levels, which reached a total of (72) agreements; and second, improving student-teacher communication had a high positive percentage at (75%), but it also had (25%) of disagreement that may due to the absence of facial expositions in addition to, the short time of the class especially if there is a large number of students which hardly for teachers to deal with; finally, saving teachers' time for usual teaching tasks in the classroom was positive for teacher at (83%) of agreement, while those who see this as unfavorable, their percentage was at (16%). This might be due to the large number of students in one class, which makes a difference for teachers in terms of the quality of the learning process.

Approval of this is shown in Alzamil's (2021) study, which agrees with the benefit of online learning for speaking skills. Oanh (2021) agrees that most teachers have mastered E-teaching equipment and how to deal with technology. While Ying, Siang, and Mohamad (2021) emphasized the importance of including technology in teaching speaking skills, which was shown clearly in Al-Yousef and Al-Mushaiqeh (2018) and (Al-Thubaiti and Al-Masaad (2020). In addition, it saves teachers time by presenting information in an easier and faster way, as Al-Buhairi (2019) and Rubaai & Khatib (2020) studies found. According to Abu Suleiman (2019), the study agreed with increased students' responsibility and motivation toward learning

speaking skills. Also, Post Raj Pokharel (2022) supports the idea that employing technology offers tools and technical opportunities. Alqahtani (2022) promotes continuous learning using the MEP, learner autonomy, and individuality.

Second Question Results

2- What are the disadvantages of using the "Madrasati Educational platform" in teaching English-speaking skills to intermediate school students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from teachers' point of view?

	Phrase	Strongly agr		Agree		Disagree		Strongly dis	
	I believe that the Madrasati platform …	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	distracts students' attention due to the absence of expressions or discomfort with conver recording.	25	35	39	51	10	13	1	1
2	obstructs teaching students' speaking skill technical difficulties such as cut-off audio c conversations or poor internet signal when uplo and viewing videos.	25	34	39	52	8	10	3	4
3	limits the required student-teacher interacti practice the language.	21	30	39	53	11	13	4	5
4	Reduce direct teacher feedback on students' spe performance.	17	24	41	55	14	17	3	4
5	makes it hard for teachers to identify stud vocabulary and grammar needs.	21	29	39	52	12	14	3	3.5

(Table 2)

Interpretation and Discussion for Second Question Result: As shown in (Table 2), teachers agree that MEP distracts students' attention due to the absence of facial expressions or discomfort with conversation recording, which reached (86%) of total agreements. Since video communication is not supported in public education for social norms, missing facial expressions while practicing speaking at MEP is one of the disadvantages, as teachers asserted. This could be problematic for teachers because facial expressions help understand students' speech when it's hard to understand because of their weak sentence structures or facilitate receiving meaning for students when it is hard for them to get the meaning of the teacher's spoken words and sentences.

In addition, the result shown in (Table 2) is that teachers believe, (83%) of total agreements, that MEP limits the required student-teacher interaction to practice the language. This could be distracted by the learning atmosphere at home as students might be afraid of their speaking performance being heard and judged by family members around them. Also, it might be affected by the weak internet signal as (86%) of teachers agreed that MEP obstructs teaching students speaking skills by technical difficulties, such as cut-off audio during conversations or poor internet signal when uploading and viewing videos.

Reducing direct teacher feedback on students' speaking performance reached a high percentage at (79%) which might be because of the dependence on Feedback recordings, class, and conversation recordings. On the other hand, (21%) disagreed.

Teachers at (81%) of agreements found that it hardly identifies students' vocabulary and grammar needs when teaching through MEP. This is affected by the other disadvantages related to MEP, such as the previously mentioned results, technical difficulties, and limited student-teacher interaction.

Besides, reducing direct teacher feedback on students' speaking performance reached a high percentage at (79%) which might be because of the dependence on Feedback recordings, class, and conversation recordings. On the other hand, (21%) disagreed.

Along with that one, teachers, at (81%) of agreements, found that it hardly identifies students' vocabulary and grammar needs when teaching through MEP. This might be affected by the other previous results of disadvantages related to MEP, such as technical difficulties and limited student-teacher interaction.

Looking at the results of related previous studies, Alzamil (2021) found that online speaking teaching could not replace face-to-face learning, which matches the absence of facial expressions. In addition to technical difficulties such as cut-off audio during conversations or poor internet signal when uploading and viewing videos, one of the most frequently reported

issues was navigation, according to Shishah (2021). At the same time, Al-Hader and Almutairy (2022) found that, too. However, Oanh (2021) found that some teachers had concerns regarding applying E-teaching activities by facing technical difficulties and needing facial expressions. Ying, Siang, and Mohamad (2021) agree that the challenges revolved around hardly identifying students' vocabulary and grammar needs, fear, and hesitation, in addition to a lack of motivation and self-confidence issues, and direct feedback on students' speaking performance because teachers missed face-to-face interaction. At the same time, it has affected bonding with students taken for granted in the physical classroom, as Post Raj Pokharel's (2022) and Al-Hader & Almutairy's (2022) findings show.

Conclusion

The MEP carries many features, such as promoting continuous learning, increasing students' motivation, keeping up with educational apps, saving teachers time, encouraging students to search, etc. However, that side with keeping the use of the platform to learn English language skills through the platform, especially the skill of speaking, as the research discussed.

On the other hand, the MEP carries several disadvantages that affect the quality of acquiring speaking skills. The most notable of these are lack of class time, Internet connection interruption, parental interference, large number of students in one class, shyness in speaking, etc.

This research is not biased towards upgrading or demoting the MEP but aims to show the reality of its use. Accordingly, the researcher pointed out the importance of using technology through the MEP and the necessity of making full use of it in teaching speaking skills. In addition, work on improving the teachers' and students' experience of using the MEP to reach the highest educational outcomes by avoiding the disadvantages teachers face while teaching English language speaking skills. Future studies can examine the effectiveness of MEP features in improving specific English-speaking skills or its use in teaching English skills to emergent learners in lower grades.

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"واقع 'ستخدام منصة مدرستي في تدريس مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية من وجهة نظر المعلمين والمعلمات في المملكة العربية السعودية"

(بحث مستخرج من رسالة الماجستير)

إعداد الباحثتان:

خلود علي الكثيري.

د. ابتسام صالح الحبيب

متخصصة في المنهاهج وطرق التدريس.

أستاذ مشارك في المناهج وطرق التدريس

قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس

جامعة جدة

2023–1445

خلاصة:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في وجهة نظر معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية حول واقع استخدام منصة مدرستي التعليمية " "MEPلتعليم مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية. استخدمت الدراسة تصميم البحث الوصفي. تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان، وشارك فيه 75 معلمًا للغة الإنجليزية في المدارس المتوسطة. وأكدت النتائج أن برنامج MEPله العديد من المزايا، مثل التحكم في الفصل، والموارد الإلكترونية، وسهولة تقييم الطلاب، والتعلم المستمر، والدردشة الحية، وإنشاء التسجيلات، وتحفيز الطلاب على التعلم والبحث، ومواكبة التطبيقات، وتعزيز التواصل بين المعلم والطالب، وأخيرا زيادة مسؤولية الطالب تجاه التعلم. ومن ناحية أخرى، تواجه بعض السلبيات، مثل تشتيت انتباه الطلاب بسبب غياب تعابير الوجه، والصعوبات التقنية (انقطاع الصوت أثناء المحادثات أو ضعف إشارة الإنترنت)، ومحدودية التفاعل بين المعلم والطالب، وانخفاض مهارات التحدث والتغذية الراجعة المباشرة، وأخيرًا، صعوبة التعرف على احتياجات الطالب من المفردات والقواعد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس مهارات التحدث، التعليم عن بعد، الهندسة الكهربائية والميكانيكية، التعلم عبر الإنترنت.