

Chapter 6

Investigation of ESL Students' Interaction With Online Information Resources

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how Saudi Arabia has a scholarship program that provides opportunities for Saudi citizens to pursue their undergraduate and graduate university education abroad. Because students have not mastered English, they initially enroll in an English institution. The internet is an enormously valuable learning tool for ESL students. However, Saudi students' use of information resources for learning English is unclear. This study thus investigates the information-seeking behavior of scholarship students when using online resources to learn ESL. The findings reveal that the students have a positive perception of online resources; however, they require training on searching for and using such resources. It is also found that most students use self-motivation to find online resources to increase their knowledge of English. The lack of awareness of appropriate resources is found to be the most common problem.

INTRODUCTION

The Web offers a new learning environment and is filled with electronic resources on all subjects. Hence, many students use the Internet to search for information resources that meet their needs. Information need determines users' behavior before and during the search process in terms of deciding what resources should be considered, where information is located, how information is obtained, and which information is appropriate. For information to be highly relevant to the needs of users, their natural behavior when looking for specific information should be known. Users' need has therefore become a fundamental pillar on which information providers depend to provide appropriate materials.

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Different aspects of information needs have been investigated. Studies claim that users are able to demand the information they need and express this clearly for those who provide information services (Mai, 2016). In fact, research differentiates between demand and need because people may lack clarity about what they need, which leads to demand for information that does not satisfy their need (Hjørland, 2007). This problem is exacerbated by the multiplicity of information resources and diversity of their forms in the digital environment. With the information explosion and the multitude of dissemination channels, a variety of information helps increase learning in the education setting such as English as a second language (ESL) programs.

ESL learners do not lack the online resources to support their language studies. The problem learners may face is knowing, locating, and accessing the resources. Therefore, finding reliable resources can be a challenge for ESL students, who may be unfamiliar with the particular words and phrases required to effectively search for a topic (Svendsen & Rennie, 2012). Thus, understanding user behavior helps information specialists guide or change the way of accessing appropriate resources. The major problem is that the individual's practices for finding the needed information are carried out incorrectly, especially when using online resources (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2011). Online resources contain many new features and functions that may make their use complex but useful for learning English. Alshibail (2001) noted that listening skills rank first among the difficulties in learning English. However, many online sources can help overcome these difficulties, such as listening to vocabulary, using spoken translation, and browsing websites that enhance listening skills.

The present study investigates ESL students' attitude and perception toward online resources to obtain insights into the ways of discovering and selecting Internet resources, reasons and purposes of the use, common barriers faced, and perception toward the resources. Its findings can both benefit specialists that provide appropriate educational resources that support English language instruction and help learners find out how to obtain the appropriate resources.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Saudi Arabia has a scholarship program that provides opportunities for Saudi citizens to pursue their undergraduate and graduate university education abroad in many of the academic disciplines needed by the government and private sector (Saudi Arabia culture bureau in Canada, 2016). Because students have not mastered English, they initially enroll in English courses at specialized institutions. Learning a second language is a major challenge for learners because they need a range of requirements and information resources. In the digital environment, different types of resources can satisfy a student's desire for an appropriate learning style. Some students like to learn by listening, some by reading, and others by speaking. Online resources have thus been recognized as an important source of linguistic and cultural knowledge for ESL learners to explore (Shen, Yuan, & Ewing 2015). The problem occurs when students do not know where to find resources for their preferred style and how to access them. However, Saudi students' use of information resources for learning English is unclear. This study thus investigates the information-seeking behavior of Saudi ESL students when using online resources.

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