

Influence of Online Learning Platforms Use on Foreign Students Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence

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ABSTRACT

Having good communication skills and understanding other country's language and their culture help foreigners adjust easily and enjoy their stay in other countries. Through the help of modern technology like the use of different online learning platforms, learning about the language and culture of other countries is much easier for the foreigners. Online learning platforms require students to have their own study schedule, download documents, learn, and analyze things by their own or other people that can help them. Thus, this study determined the influence of online learning platforms use on foreign students' language education and cultural competence. Descriptive-correlational research design was applied and purposely included 54 foreign students to answer the research problem. Findings show that foreign students highly use online learning platforms. They also rated the level of their language education proficiency as average and high on cultural competence. The researchers found that online learning platforms use influence the language education proficiency and cultural competence of foreign students. Also, the use of online learning platforms predicts language education and cultural competence of foreign students. Moreover, this study concludes that teachers should encourage students to participate and use online learning platforms to boost their language education proficiency and cultural competence. Finally, teachers need to provide foreign students with lessons and activities that can incorporate to the use of online learning platforms.

Keywords: *online learning platforms, language education proficiency, cultural competence*

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges in foreign language education, both globally and nationally, is the insufficient effectiveness of teaching grammar in isolation. It is increasingly recognized that foreign language learning should encompass various language skills, including speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening (Erhan, 2021; Arvanitis, 2019). On the other hand, modern technologies promote sociolinguistic competence, which is the ability to use language in different social contexts (Sarimsakova, 2020). These platforms offer a convenient and flexible way for students to learn foreign languages and have gained increasing popularity due to their effectiveness (Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021). They provide a wide range of functionalities to support language learning, create ready-made lessons and exercises that offer content storage, and permit self-paced learning (Pichugin et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2021, Liu et al., 2020; Karataş & Tuncer, 2020).

Online learning, driven by technological advancements, encompasses diverse formats like video-based, live, or self-paced, serving individual or group settings. Custom-built online learning platforms, exemplified by Ken42, cater to specific institution needs, enhancing training processes and employee onboarding. Lastly, the role of Content Management Systems (CMS), like WordPress, in centralizing digital content for learning, is highlighted.

The study delves into culture's role in language learning, emphasizing sociolinguistic competence beyond proficiency. Language learning is a major part of increasing cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, and cultural competence in general it stresses adapting to modern technology's cultural implications. Learning a language also helps connecting with a different culture and provides great information and knowledge about different cultures (Minoia, 2019).

Technology can potentially transform pedagogy and educators' classroom practices by providing new ways to engage learners (Finger et al. 2015). Linguistic fluency explores participants' ability to articulate ideas and express themselves in the target language, while communicative competence delves into their effectiveness in using language to convey messages and engage in meaningful communication. This dual approach provides a nuanced understanding of the participants' language education proficiency, capturing both the technical aspects and the practical application of their language proficiency.

Cultural competence consists of intercultural sensitivity and cultural adaptability. Intercultural sensitivity assesses participants' awareness and understanding of diverse cultural norms, fostering effective cross-cultural communication. Cultural adaptability explores individuals' capacity to adjust and thrive in various cultural contexts. Together, these dimensions contribute to a holistic evaluation of participants' cultural competence, acknowledging the integral role of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in language education proficiency development (Ala-Mutka 2011).

The importance of this research is underscored by the need to address the limitations of traditional language education, where teaching grammar in isolation has proven to be ineffective. This study purposely gathered foreign students studying at Adventist University of the Philippines. The findings show that the use of online learning platforms help foreign students improve their language education proficiency and cultural competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1960), Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and Cultural Intelligence Theory (Earley and Ang, 2003). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory highlights the role of observational learning and social interactions. In the context of online language learning, it suggests that exposure to diverse proficiency and cultural content on these platforms aids foreign students in acquiring language education proficiency and cultural competence (Bandura, 1960). However, Davis' Technology Acceptance Model focuses on the perceived ease of use and usefulness of technology. Applied to online language learning, students' perceptions of the usability and effectiveness of these platforms shape their engagement and, consequently, influence on language education proficiency and cultural competence (Davis, 1989). Furthermore, Cultural Intelligence Theory of Earley and Ang (2003) emphasizes the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts. In online language learning, exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural content enhances foreign students' cultural intelligence, contributing to improved cultural competence. Siemens' connectives underscore networked learning and the role of technology in fostering connections. In online language learning, the interconnected nature of these platforms enables students to engage with a global community, facilitating language proficiency development and intercultural interactions (Siemens, 2004).

Online Learning Platforms

Online platforms are one of the ways to learn and to teach languages (Pichugin et al., 2022). It is defined as digital environments fostering linguistic and intercultural skills, offer both

synchronous and asynchronous interactions, including text, audio, video, or multimodal communication. Online intercultural exchange (OIE) engages students in intercultural interactions, guided by educators (O'Dowd, 2017). Learning platforms with wide functionalities have become the most effective tools to organize the foreign language learning process and develop language education proficiency (Karats & Tuner, 2020). Some of the best online learning platforms for foreign languages are Duolingo, Busuu, goFLUENT, and Tribalingual (Scribbr, 2020). These platforms use various features such as gamification, personalization, social networking, and cultural immersion to motivate and engage learners.

In the study of Ravi Shankar (2023) online platforms offer students comfort, convenience and flexibility to learn languages when and where they want. These sites teach languages that can develop their speaking proficiency and can evaluate their statements. According to Liu et al. (2013) the online learning platforms use the variety of that supports the user's role administrator, educator and the students (Ouadoud et al., 2016). Moreover, Pichugin et al., (2022) state that online learning platforms become popular among teachers, students in high school most likely the one who really need a development in terms of learning languages and teachers develop lessons and adapt learning materials to specific teaching need.

Lastly, despite acknowledging limitations, they conclude that platforms like Duolingo can complement traditional methods in improving language education proficiency and cultural competence (Lee et al., 2023). Benefits of these platforms include authentic exposure, enhanced motivation, and intercultural awareness (Belz, 2003; Byram, 2006). Challenges encompass technical issues, pedagogical considerations, and intercultural complexities (O'Dowd, 2010; Dervin, 2011).

Language Education Proficiency

Understanding language education proficiency empowers individuals to communicate openly with others and acquire languages effectively. Proficiency necessitates competence in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Proficient learners of a second language can confidently express themselves across various topics, incorporating native-like speed, pauses, and adherence to native-like rules of correctness. Proficiency signifies the capability to utilize language spontaneously and unrehearsed in each context. In essence, language education proficiency characterizes the precision with which one uses and comprehends language (White et al., 2023). Furthermore, language education proficiency can be described as the capacity to use language with precision and suitability, both orally and in written form, across a range of contexts (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).

Linguistic Fluency

Linguistic fluency is characterized by the ease, confidence, and precision with which an individual can use and comprehend a foreign language. Achieving language fluency typically entails reaching a level of full professional proficiency or beyond (Rodriguez, 2023). Fluency allows skilled speakers to exhibit a natural flow in conversation by speaking with frequent pauses and hesitations. The major difference when comparing fluency and proficiency is that fluency deals with the smoothness of one's speech, while proficiency pertains to the ability to communicate accurately. Both proficiency and fluency take time and effort to improve, and someone can possess any level of fluency or proficiency regardless of their skill in the other category (White et al. 2023).

Moreover, Fromkin, et al. (2017) emphasized that there is no strict constraint on sentence length, although extremely long sentences are not common in practical usage. Language education proficiency, characterized by understanding of words and grammar, manifest in

linguistic activities. Proficiency in language involves utilizing linguistic patterns to connect phrases and sentences, allowing the construction of longer sentences. Effective communication occurs when individuals convey meaningful messages during speech.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence refers to the capability to attain communicative objectives in a socially suitable manner. It is both organized and goal-oriented, encompassing the proficiency to choose and employ skills that are fitting and effective within a given context. This competence extends to both verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021.). The concept of communicative competence encompasses both the implicit understanding of a language and the capability to employ it effectively. Also known as communication competence, it serves as a crucial factor for social acceptance (Nordquist, 2020).

A learner's ability to communicate and comprehend in the target language is measured by their proficiency. Language education proficiency consists of speaking skills which are when skilled speakers can hold appropriate pronunciation, express ideas clearly, and participate in meaningful dialogues (White et al., 2023). According to Smith Aris (2022), effective communication entails equipping learners with the skill to use language in a manner that optimally conveys ideas from one person to another with clarity.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the capability and capacity to understand the differences within a cultural ethnic group that makes each student unique while celebrating those variations. This understanding provides the basis for the creation of culturally responsive learning environments and teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom (Schaeffer et al. 2021). Schools must be aware of cultural differences and how those differences influence learning styles, communication, and behaviour. Additionally, cultural competence of school staff is essential to a culturally responsive learning environment where every student's cultures, languages, and life experiences are acknowledged, validated, celebrated, and positively reflected in the curriculum. When culture is ignored, students and their families are at risk of not getting the support they need, or worse yet, receiving assistance that is more harmful than helpful (Annie et al. 2021).

Developing cultural competence helps understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It gives the ability to compare different cultures with other and better understand the differences. Unconsciously, everybody brings their own cultural frame of interpretation to any situation. This is not to say that culture alone determines how one interprets a situation. One's own unique history and personality also play an important role (Wilson et al., 2023).

Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity refers to an individual's adeptness at responding positively to cultural differences. The process of teaching intercultural sensitivity can be perceived as challenging. Despite approaching it with knowledge and compassion, there may be varying levels of progress among learners in their efforts to connect with culturally diverse individuals (Sieck, 2021). Additionally, Maican and Cocorada (2021) established that cultural patterns influence academic environments, including foreign language learning. They feel anxious and uncomfortable about what will happen in certain educational situations and prefer not to participate too actively. Lastly, Lin and Lai (2019) showed that students' behavioural intention significantly predicted their actual behaviour for students with high self-regulation skills but

not for students with low self-regulation skills.

Cultural Adaptability

Features and characteristics of cultural competence are adaptability which is the capacity to modify behaviour and communication to fit different cultural contexts is a key component of cultural competence. Open-mindedness, which are culturally competent embrace variety and avoid ethnocentrism by being receptive to various viewpoints and lifestyles. Empathy, which means sharing and comprehending the emotions of people from diverse cultural backgrounds enhances cultural competency and promotes constructive communication. Combining language proficiency with cultural competence creates a well-rounded communicator capable of engaging effectively in diverse linguistic and cultural environments (August & Shannah et al., 2018).

Relationship of Online Learning Platforms on Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence

Chen and Hsu (2018) indicated that the system not only heightened learners' interest and confidence in learning English and other cultures but also increased their willingness to communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, Rai et al. (2020) found out that massive open online courses (MOOCs) create chances for learners to engage with a variety of resources, instructors, and peers, facilitating reflection on both their own culture and that of others.

However, Teh (2021) concludes that these platforms, when integrated with intercultural learning, can improve language education proficiency and cultural competence. The author argues that platforms like Duolingo and Busuu enhance intercultural competence through exposure to diverse resources, interaction with native speakers, and fostering cultural awareness (Lee et al., 2023; Zhang & Zhou, 2019; Teh & Lee, 2020, 2021).

Lastly, learning a language increases cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, and cultural competence. Language learning extends beyond merely acquiring linguistic ability. It fosters cultural competencies, which are essential skills enabling us to comprehend and establish meaningful connections across diverse cultural settings. Engaging with foreign languages compels individuals to confront personal blind spots and adopt alternative cultural perspectives. This process cultivates cultural agility, mitigates unconscious bias, and fosters a mind-set of openness and receptivity (Pep Talk Radio, 2023)

METHODS

The research design adopts a descriptive and correlational approach to examine the influence of using online learning platforms on the language education proficiency and cultural competence of foreign students. The researchers focus on foreign students at Adventist University of the Philippines during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024. Purposive sampling technique was applied in this study to gather all foreign students to answer the survey questions. The institutional Ethics Review Board (ERB) of the school give a consent to the proposed study. Anonymity and confidentiality were observed during the entire study.

There are four instruments that utilized in this study; first the Demographic Section (DS) instrument contains the questions that identifies the demographic profile of the respondents. Second, Online Learning Platforms Questionnaires (OLPQ) was a mixture of self-constructed and adapted instrumentation that was focused on the use of online learning platforms. OLPQ employs a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 5 (always) to 1 (never), to evaluate participants' extent of use of different online learning platforms. Third, Language Education Proficiency

Scale (LEPS) employed in this study was drawn from the literature of Marian, Blumenfeld, and Kaushanskaya (2007) and aims to gauge the level of language education proficiency among foreign students. Each dimensions have 11 questions. Last instrument is Cultural Competence Scale (CCS) was derived from the works of Huang, Mehta, and Elo (2019) and was specifically designed to assess the cultural competence of foreign students. Cultural competence was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), and compose of 20-items questions.

Table 1 below presents the reliability of each subscale of the instruments used and were determined through Cronbach Alpha. The result shows that three of the questionnaires use are excellent such as linguistic fluency, intercultural sensitivity, and cultural adaptability. Two instruments are good such as use of online learning platforms and communicative competence. This result implies that the instruments used in the study was valid and reliable to answer the research problems.

Table 1
Reliability of Online Learning Platforms Use, Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence Instruments

| Variables | Number of Items | Cronbach Alpha | Verbal Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Online Learning Platforms | 12 | 0.903 | Good |
| Language Education Proficiency | | | |
| Linguistic Fluency | 11 | 0.932 | Excellent |
| Communicative Competence | 11 | 0.909 | Good |
| Cultural Competence | | | |
| Intercultural Sensitivity | 10 | 0.936 | Excellent |
| Cultural Adaptability | 10 | 0.941 | Excellent |

Descriptive statistics were used to classify respondent’s profiles, students’ use of online learning platforms, language education proficiency and cultural competence. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was utilized to find out the relationship among online language learning platforms use, language education proficiency, and cultural competence of foreign students. Linear Regression Analysis was used to find out if online learning platforms use predict the language education proficiency and cultural competence of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents the respondents’ overall extent of using online learning platforms. With an overall mean of 3.60 (SD = 0.69), this result implies that the foreign students are highly using an online learning platform.

Table 2
Extent of Online Learning Platforms Use of Foreign Students

| | Mean | SD | Scaled Response | Verbal Interpretation |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Online Learning Platforms Use | 3.60 | 0.69 | Often | Highly Used |

Legend: 1-1.49 = Never; 1.50-2.49 = Rarely; 2.50-3.49 = Sometimes; 3.50-4.49 = Often; 4.50-5 = Always

The transformative impact of mobile technologies on language learning practices is evident, as learners effectively utilize online platforms to achieve their language learning goals. Moreover, the role of information, communication, and technology in education underscores the significance of online learning platforms, providing dynamic and interactive language experiences. As educators, recognizing and harnessing the potential of these digital tools is essential for supporting language learners effectively (Bećirović et al. 2021; Ho, 2019; Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015).

Foreign Students level of Language Education Proficiency

Table 3 shows the overall level of language education proficiency among the respondents. With an overall mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.75), respondents assessed their level of language education proficiency as moderate. They responded neutral and agree for linguistic fluency (mean = 3.35; SD = 0.82) and communicative competence (mean = 3.54; SD = 0.76), respectively. These findings indicate that foreign students are moderately proficient in linguistic fluency and highly proficient in communicative competence.

Table 3
Foreign Students' Level of Language Education Proficiency

| | Mean | SD | Scaled Response | Verbal Interpretation |
|--|------|------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Linguistic Fluency | 3.35 | 0.82 | Neutral | Moderately Proficient |
| Communicative Competence | 3.54 | 0.76 | Agree | Highly Proficient |
| Language Education Proficiency (<i>Overall Mean</i>) | 3.45 | 0.75 | Neutral | Moderately Proficient |

Legend: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.50-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.49 = Neutral; 3.50-4.49 = Agree; 4.50-5 = Strongly Agree

Improving foreign students' language education proficiency levels involves addressing several key factors. First, it's crucial to assess speaking skills, which remain a challenge, particularly at basic levels (Carina, Tom & Smits, 2022). Moreover, implementing bilingual teaching strategies across various content courses can significantly enhance foreign students' proficiency in the language and academic performance (Olga et al., 2019). Linguistic reflection is also pivotal it plays a significant role in developing a student's linguistic personality and proficiency in a foreign language (Irina et al., 2021). In essence, focusing on speaking proficiency, communication skills, linguistic reflection, and bilingual teaching methods collectively contributes to improving foreign students' language education proficiency levels.

Foreign Students Level of Cultural Competence

Table 4 presents the overall level of foreign students' cultural competence and its dimensions in terms of intercultural sensitivity and communicative competence. The respondents rated their cultural competence as high level (grand mean of 3.75, SD =0.70). Both intercultural sensitivity and cultural adaptability were rated as high also with mean of 3.84 (SD = 0.77) and 3.66 (SD = 0.78) respectively and this result implies that the foreign students are highly competent in intercultural sensitivity and cultural adaptability.

Table 4
Foreign Students' Level of Cultural Competence

| | Mean | SD | Scaled Response | Verbal Interpretation |
|--|------|----|-----------------|-----------------------|
|--|------|----|-----------------|-----------------------|

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|-------|------------------|
| Intercultural Sensitivity | 3.84 | 0.77 | Agree | Highly Competent |
| Cultural Adaptability | 3.66 | 0.78 | Agree | Highly Competent |
| Cultural Competence (Overall Mean) | 3.75 | 0.70 | Agree | Highly Competent |

Legend: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.50-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.49 = Neutral; 3.50-4.49 = Agree; 4.50-5 = Strongly Agree

Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc et al. (2022) found out that students expressed interest in making new friends, learning about cultures, and improving language proficiency through online cultural exchange activities. This study underscores the effectiveness of such programs in enhancing intercultural competence among language learners.

Furthermore, Vieira (2024) emphasized that cultural adaptability enables learners to navigate diverse contexts, adjust communication styles, and thrive academically. Online education facilitates global connectivity and cross-cultural exchange, allowing students to interact with peers from different backgrounds (Edutopia, 2021).

Relationship of Online Learning Platforms Use to Foreign Students’ Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence

The findings of the study on how students' language education proficiency is influenced by their use of online learning platforms are shown in Table 5. With association coefficients of 0.372** ($p = .006$) the language education proficiency *significantly influences* the use of online learning platforms, which suggests that the foreign students are improving when they use online learning platforms. Furthermore, cultural competence is also influenced by using online learning platforms. With association coefficients of 0.373** ($p = .005$), which suggests that the foreign students are also improving when they use online learning platforms.

Table 5
*Relationship of Online Learning Platforms Use to Foreign Students’
 Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence*

| Mean | Correlation Coefficient | Significance | Verbal Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Language Education Proficiency | .372** | .006 | Significant |
| Linguistic Fluency | .344* | .011 | Significant |
| Communicative Competence | .363** | .007 | Significant |
| Cultural Competence | .373** | .005 | Significant |
| Intercultural Sensitivity | .223 | .104 | Not Significant |
| Cultural Adaptability | .452*** | .000 | Significant |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Lee et. al. (2023) found out that students exposed to a culturally embedded English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum exhibited greater improvement in L2 motivation, cultural communicative competence, and English proficiency compared to their counterparts. Virtual exchange programs and globally networked learning environments further enhance communicative skills and cultural awareness (Lee et al., 2023; Deardorff, 2006). Collaborative initiatives between schools from different countries provide authentic contexts for cross-cultural communication, emphasizing cultural nuances and mutual understanding (Lee et al., 2023; Deardorff, 2006). Thus, online platforms serve as dynamic spaces for foreign students to develop linguistic fluency, communicative competence, and cultural sensitivity.

Online Learning Platform Use as Predictor of Foreign Students' Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence

Result of the study shows that the total variance is explained by one predictor, $F(1, 54) = 8.35, p < .001$) of this total variance accounted for 37.20% of students' language education proficiency is attributed by the use of online learning platforms. However, cultural competence as the dependent shows that the total variance is explained by one predictor, $F(1, 54) = 8.43, p < .001$) of this total variance accounted for 37.30% of students' cultural competence is attributed by using online learning platforms.

Table 6
Online Learning Platform Use as Predictor of Foreign Students' Language Education Proficiency and Cultural Competence

| Model | R | R ² | R ² Change | df | F | t | Sig. |
|---|-------|----------------|-----------------------|----|------|------|------|
| Dependent: Language Education Proficiency | 0.372 | 0.138 | 0.122 | 1 | 8.35 | 3.85 | .000 |
| Dependent: Cultural Competence | 0.373 | 0.139 | 0.123 | 1 | 8.43 | 4.93 | .000 |

The use of online learning platforms by international students has a substantial impact on their linguistic fluency and communication skills in today's interconnected world of globalization and cross-cultural contacts. These platforms present exceptional chances for language learning and cross-cultural interaction. Insights from scholarly research reveal that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a core element of foreign language education. It involves understanding cultural nuances, empathy, and adaptability in communication (Lee, Ho & Chen, 2023).

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

Online learning platforms use influences the language education proficiency and cultural competence of the foreign students. This suggests that foreign students' language education proficiency and cultural competence improve whenever they use online learning platforms. To continuously improve the foreign students' language education proficiency and cultural competence, they must be actively involved in their projects and activities prepared by teachers and other persons that can help them. Online learning platforms-related projects and activities should not be a barrier to learning because they will help foreign students expand their knowledge and improve their language education proficiency.

Teachers can support and encourage their students to participate in foreign language learning and cultural learning to boost their knowledge and improve their cultural competence. They need to use a teaching method that allows students to freely interact, test their capabilities, and develop their research skills. Other researchers may conduct additional research on the influence of online learning platforms on language education proficiency and cultural competence of students by including and differentiating the effects using sex, grade level, nationality, and length of residence in of the foreign students in other countries.

The study does not explore additional influencing variables such as students' prior language proficiency or the specific language being studied. It does not also encompass students of diverse sexes.

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