The Influence of Digital Empowerment on Students' English Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

The ability to utilise technology in language learning as a platform in reinforcing English proficiency is important. However, to what extent these tools influence students. Thus, this study aims to investigate the influence of digital empowerment on students' English proficiency based on two different variables; gender and fields of study. About 150 Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students were chosen for this study using a simple random sampling method. This study utilises a quantitative research design by using questionnaires as the research instrument. The questionnaires consist of two parts: the demographic information and the second part, which focuses on variables relevant to the research objectives. Data were collected via Google Forms and analysed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics to determine the mean values. Inferential statistics were then employed to assess differences in means across gender and field of study. The results show that there is no significant difference between male and female students in how digital tools influence their English proficiency. However, from a field of study perspective, students from the Business and Administration field acknowledge digital tools as more useful and believe they have a stronger positive influence on their English proficiency compared to students from the Social Sciences, and Science and Technology fields. This study also discusses its implications for students, institutions, and policymakers who can develop beneficial outcomes in improving English language proficiency through digital empowerment in the future.

Keywords: digital empowerment, English proficiency, language learning

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the world has rapidly evolved with the growth of technologies for global development. The implementation of digital tools has become one of the most effective platforms for enhancing knowledge and skills to a higher level of proficiency. Commonly used digital tools, such as Google Classroom, YouTube, Padlet, and Google Scholar (Mucundanyi & Woodley, 2021), are instrumental in helping students achieve better learning outcomes. These platforms offer engaging and interactive approaches which motivate students to actively participate in their courses and improve their overall learning experience, as digital tools can help students have a stronger engagement in learning English.

In the context of language learning, the ability to utilise technology as a platform in reinforcing English proficiency is important. Digital tools provide students with diverse resources and opportunities to develop their language skills beyond what is typically covered in schools. By enabling independent learning, these tools contribute to producing students who are not only academically competent but also equipped with strong English proficiency as an essential skill for future employability. Moreover, the students can also gain the best personalised learning experience with the use of digital tools.

However, there is a gap on to what extent these tools can actually influence students. In addition, the scope of

digital tools influence on the students' English proficiency in school and daily communication usage is not clearly defined in past studies. Many researchers were uncertain of the effectiveness of digital learning, as the traditional method has always been the primary way of learning that relies on lectures and memorisation, which is also known as the lecture-based environment (Kumari et al., 2023). There is a noticeable lack of research focusing on the concept of digital empowerment and its influence on English proficiency (Kumari et al., 2023; Wang, 2022). Most of the studies explore the general benefits of digital learning tools, but do not address how these tools can help students from different backgrounds and learning styles by providing a personalised approach to language acquisition.

Therefore, this research aims to explore whether the use of digital tools, or in other words, digital empowerment, influences the English proficiency of Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam students based on gender and fields of study. This study is helpful to fill in the gap and explore its positive influence towards the students and society as a whole by answering these three research questions; 1) What is the influence of digital empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam students' English proficiency?, 2) What is the influence of digital empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam students' English proficiency based on gender?, and 3) What is the influence of digital empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam students' English proficiency based on the fields of study? The findings of this study could benefit students, teachers, and technology developers in enhancing the language learning experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Influence of Digital Tools

Digital tools have become integral to daily life and are especially practical in education, where they enable teachers and students to collaborate, explore, design, and share content. For instance, Mucundanyi and Woodley (2021) identified Google Classroom, Google Docs, Canva, and YouTube as effective platforms for collaboration between instructors and learners. Despite their ubiquity, many people may not fully recognise how frequently they engage with digital tools. To use them effectively across different contexts, individuals must develop sufficient knowledge and skills (Lcom, 2023). There are many benefits of digital tools in education among learners, specifically.

First, the benefits of digital tools are evident in the area of learning. They enhance engagement and motivation by offering interactive resources such as mobile apps, websites, and online platforms that provide personalised experiences (Kayumov, 2024). Second, digital tools improve productivity in professional and academic settings. Applications like Google Drive and Notion help users organise tasks within an integrated workspace, encouraging systematic planning and efficiency (Nduwimana & Ndoricimpa, 2023).

Finally, digital tools transform both communication and access to knowledge. They enable instant interaction with family, friends, and colleagues regardless of distance, while also reducing the cost of communication (Martinez et al., 2020). At the same time, they provide limitless access to information and contribute to narrowing societal gaps through the rapid development of ICT (Martinez et al., 2020). Therefore, digital literacy is essential for maximising the potential of these technologies in meaningful and effective ways, especially among students.

Students' Behaviour to Study based on Gender and Field of Study

Gender can influence students' behaviour in both traditional and e-learning environments. Male and female students often have different preferences when it comes to learning styles, where females typically show a higher level of engagement with digital tools, as evidenced by studies on technology use in education (Ahmadi, 2018; Alakrash & Razak, 2021). Female students are often more likely to engage with online platforms for language learning, finding digital resources such as educational apps and e-learning tools more accessible and effective in improving their language skills (Sherafati & Mohammadi, 2016). In contrast, male students may be more inclined to rely on traditional classroom settings, where the teacher's direct instruction aligns more with their learning preferences (Bakar et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding these gender-based differences is crucial when considering the impact of e-learning on students' academic behaviour.

While in the context of students' behaviour to study based on fields of study, it shows that different disciplines require distinct approaches to learning. For example, students in fields such as Science and Technology may prefer traditional methods that provide clear, structured guidance and hands-on learning experiences (Muftah, 2022). On the other hand, students in fields like Business and Administration may be more inclined toward e-learning platforms that offer flexibility that allows them to access resources at their convenience (Al-Sharqii & Abbasi, 2020). The variety in field-specific learning preferences indicates the need for personalised learning strategies to cater to the distinct needs of academic disciplines. Different fields of study play an important role in shaping the students' learning behaviours. Thus, this shows the importance of adapting both traditional and digital learning methods to suit the varying needs of different student groups.

The Impact of Digital Tools towards Students' English Proficiency

Nowadays, students are very open to student-centred learning methods as they can use different ways of digital tools than sticking to the traditional method to gain information. Wang (2022) stated that due to the development of today's era, students are more interested to learn through platforms with innovative knowledge, besides learning from textbooks, as they can display an improved version of their values and abilities themselves in becoming competent learners of the English language. Sherafati and Mohammadi (2016) explained that digital tools are a way of learning that gives learners access to different databases, information and knowledge, which are accessible at any time and any place by providing useful yet rich content based on what is required by the learners. This shows that digital tools are platforms that bring benefits to individuals. Kayumov (2024) also claimed that digital tools as technology-based resources that have the potential to provide benefits to users with access to authentic materials and resources.

Digital tools usage is also regarded as a form of sustainable learning skills (Liu et al., 2020, as cited in Nduwimana & Ndoricimpa, 2023). Today's technologies such as the Internet, Skype, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, mobile phones and other interactive boards, add stimulus and proper engagement for the learners (Tamandani & Jahanshahi, 2016). The existence of online instructions definitely makes English learning easier as it stimulates the process of acquiring knowledge by teaching the learners the correct usage of English skills for proper meaning because it is well-delivered through the sentences constructed and word choice (Tamandani & Jahanshahi, 2016). However, digital tools could have a few shortcomings such as limited physical interaction between language learners and those who have limited knowledge of digital literacy might not benefit much from the e-learning applications since it is a student-centred approach where they must put extra effort to get the language knowledge as compared to accessible notes given by instructors in the classrooms (Sherafati & Mohammadi, 2016).

Previous studies have generally focused on the general effectiveness of digital tools without examining how the specific context of the students' gender or fields of study might influence their experiences and proficiency development. Furthermore, while there is significant research on the role of digital tools in language acquisition, much of the focus has been on vocabulary acquisition or listening skills (Alakrash & Razak, 2021). Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating the broader influence of digital tools on all four core English language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, across genders as well as different academic disciplines.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research design to analyse the influence of technology, specifically digital tools, on English language proficiency among UiTM Shah Alam students. This research design utilised questionnaires as the primary research tool to gather in-depth information on the influence it has on students in maximising their English language skills. By using a quantitative approach, the research ensures objectivity and allows for precise measurement of how digital tools contribute to language proficiency (Kayumov, 2024).

This research targets the students from three different fields of study at Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam campus, which are social sciences, science and technology, and business and administration. This study used a simple random sampling method. By randomly choosing respondents, the results of the study can be generalised

with greater confidence. It was determined to be sufficient for achieving reliable results while ensuring that the sample represents the broader student population of UiTM. According to Thomas (2022), the simple random sampling method is straightforward and minimises the risk of sampling bias. Additionally, every individual in the population has an equal probability of being selected which makes it an ideal sampling technique for this study.

There were two parts of the survey - the first part consists of multiple-choice questions on a demographic background, while the second part is a Likert-scale item containing 30 questions that were adapted from two research papers, Kayumov (2024) and Sherafati and Mohammadi (2016), focusing on e-tools, digital tools, and the influence of technology on English language learning. The survey was administered using Google Form, and the link was shared randomly to the participants via email and social media platforms. A total of 150 responses were collected from the survey. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Their participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The data were then tabulated and analysed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics to address the three research objectives of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Digital Empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam Students' English Proficiency

The first research question of this study, 'What is the influence of digital empowerment on student English proficiency?' is answered using the charts below
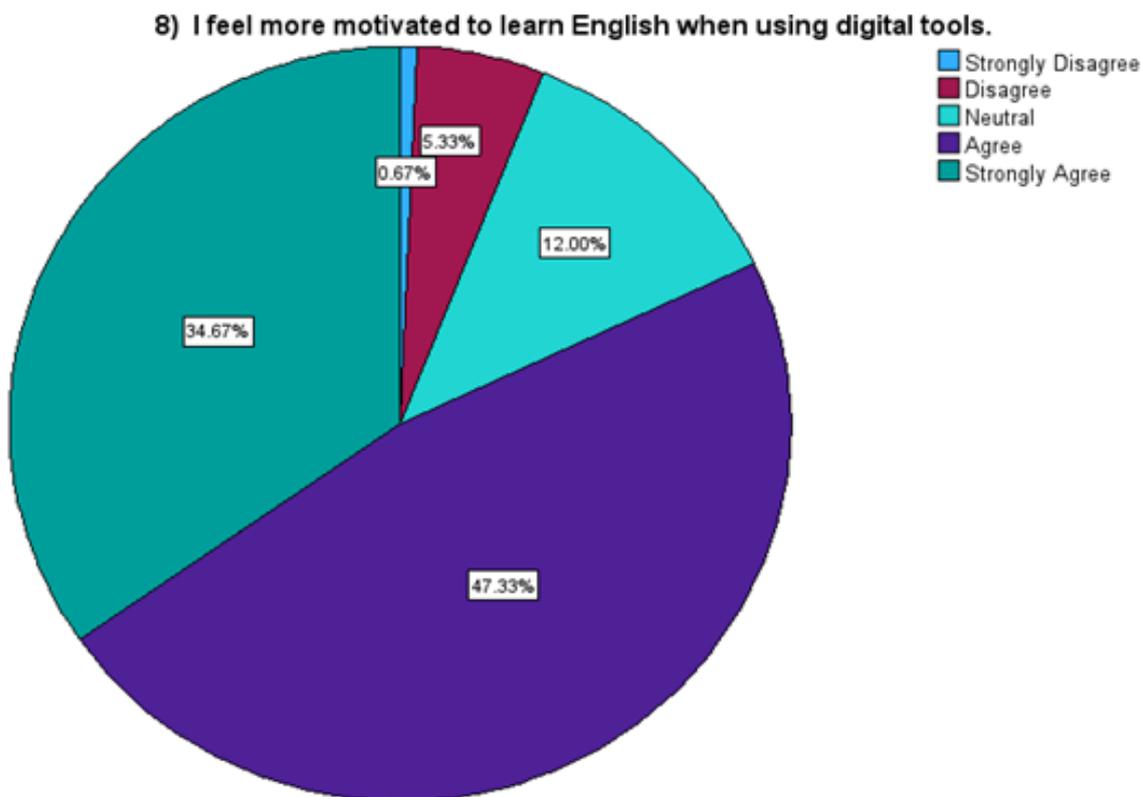

Figure 1: Motivated to learn English when using digital tools

Based on Figure 1, the result shows that 47.33% of the respondents agreed to feel more motivated to learn English when using digital tools, 34.67% strongly agreed, 12.00% neutral, 5.33% disagreed and 0.67% strongly disagreed.
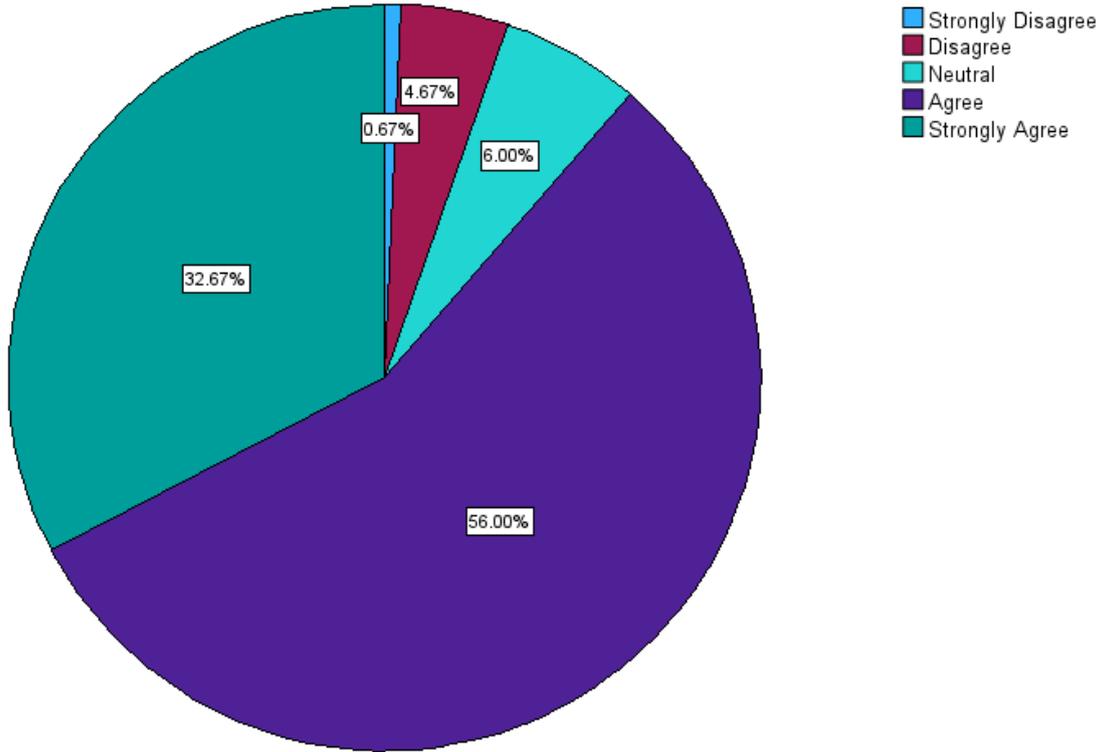
Figure 2: Digital tools make learning English more accessible

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the respondents chose 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' (88.67%) on finding digital tools make English learning more accessible to them. Only 6.00% of the respondents chose neutral, while another 5.34% disagreed (Strongly Disagree and Disagree) on digital tools make English learning more accessible to them.
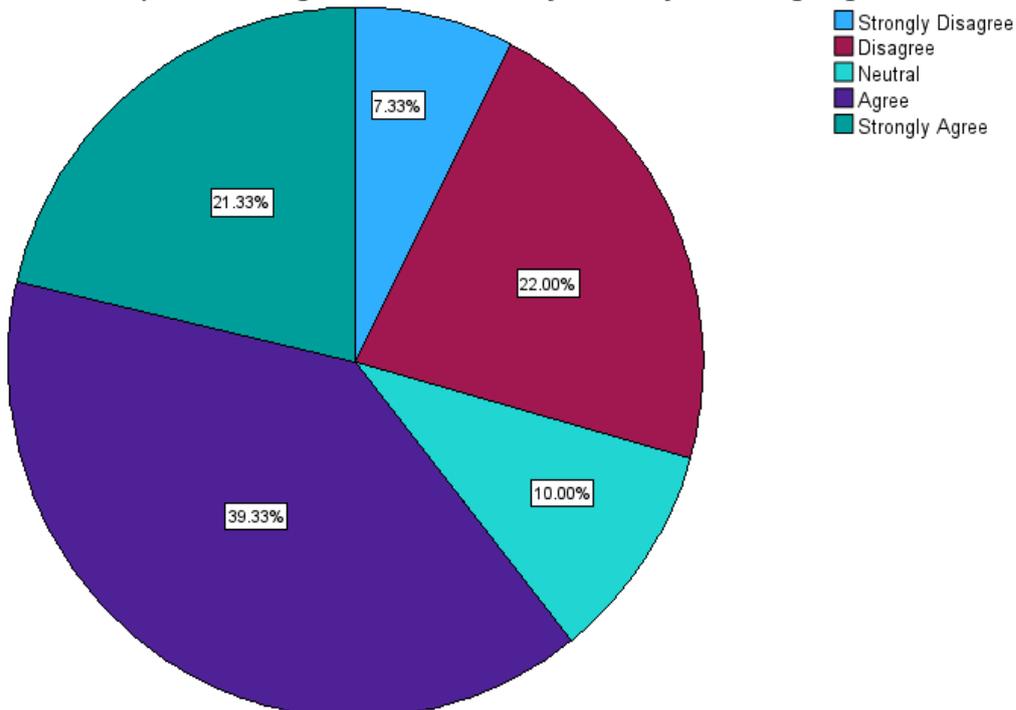

Figure 3: Digital tools decrease efficiency in learning English

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of digital tools decrease the students' efficiency in learning English. 60.66% of the respondents agreed that digital tools decrease their efficiency in learning English, which they chose 'Agree' (39.33%) and 'Strongly Agree' (21.33%) respectively. Next, 22.00% of the respondents chose 'Disagree' and 7.33% chose 'Strongly Disagree' while another 10.00% chose 'Neutral' on digital tools decrease the students' efficiency in learning English.

Therefore, this shows that the use of digital tools does increase the students' motivation and accessibility. As stated by Wang (2022), it is agreed that students nowadays need to be more diligent in learning through innovative approaches to become more competent in the English language. The study reveals that students' ability to use digital tools effectively increases their motivation to improve their English proficiency. However, it seems to contradict the findings in Figure 3, as most of the respondents agreed that digital tools decrease the students' efficiency in learning English.

The Influence of Digital Empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam Students' English Proficiency based on Gender

The second research question, 'What is the influence of digital empowerment on students' English proficiency based on gender?' is addressed using the tables below.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.014[a]	4	.733
Likelihood Ratio	2.321	4	.677
Linear-by-Linear Association	.791	1	.374
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .37.

Table 1: Relationship between gender and motivation

The result shows that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and motivation to learn English when using digital tools, $X^2(4) = 2.014$, $p > .05$. Hence, gender had no influence on motivation for English proficiency.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.192[a]	4	.700
Likelihood Ratio	2.464	4	.651
Linear-by-Linear Association	.551	1	.458
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .37.

Table 2: Relationship between gender and accessibility

The result in Table 2 indicates that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and accessibility to learning English when using digital tools, $X^2(4) = 2.192$, $p > .05$. Hence, gender did not influence accessibility for English proficiency.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.789[a]	4	.774
Likelihood Ratio	1.810	4	.771
Linear-by-Linear Association	.284	1	.594
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.03.

Table 3: Relationship between gender and efficiency

Table 3 also reveals that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and efficiency in learning English when using digital tools, $X^2(4) = 1.789$, $p > .05$. Hence, gender had no influence on efficiency for English proficiency.

The analysis shows that there are no significant differences in gender in the influence of digital empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam students' English proficiency. The studies conducted by Ahmadi (2018), and Alakrash and Razak (2021), emphasised that female students prefer education learning using digital tools as they find them more accessible and effective to improve their language skills. Nevertheless, a previous study by Bakar et al. (2021) shows the same outcome indicating that male prefers direct learning with a traditional teaching approach with guided instruction. Similarly, in this study, female students find digital tools to be more helpful in terms of efficiency and flexibility towards their overall English proficiency compared to male students at UiTM Shah Alam. Thus, both males and females have a similar perception of digital tools as an accessible and flexible medium for improving English proficiency.

The Influence of Digital Empowerment on UiTM Shah Alam Students' English Proficiency Based on Fields of Study

The findings of the last research question of this study, 'What is the influence of digital empowerment on student English proficiency based on the fields of study?' are shown in the tables below.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.911[a]	8	.767
Likelihood Ratio	5.378	8	.717
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 6 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .31.

Table 4: Relationship between field of study and motivation

The results in Table 4 demonstrate that there was no statistically significant relationship between fields of study and motivation to learn English when using digital tools, $X^2(8) = 4.911$, $p > .05$. Hence, fields of study had no influence on motivation for English proficiency.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.882[a]	8	.661
Likelihood Ratio	6.316	8	.612
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 9 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .31.

Table 5: Relationship between field of study and accessibility

Table 5 displays the relationship between field of study and accessibility, and it shows that there was no statistically significant relationship between fields of study and accessibility to learning English when using digital tools, $X^2(8) = 5.882$, $p > .05$. Hence, fields of study had no influence on accessibility for English proficiency.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.321[a]	8	.611
Likelihood Ratio	6.411	8	.601
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 4 cells (26.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.37.

Table 6: Relationship between field of study and efficiency

Table 6 shows that there was no statistically significant relationship between fields of study and efficiency in learning English when using digital tools, $X^2(8) = 6.321$, $p > .05$. Hence, fields of study had no influence on efficiency for English proficiency.

Findings from this study indicate that students, regardless of their fields of study, perceive digital tools as a comprehensive approach to English language learning. Thus, the findings corroborate the statement by Lencina and Elena (2021) that young people these days are more proficient when they can easily access information without limitations to help them in learning. These also show that students across all three fields of study perceived digital tools as useful for enhancing their English language skills. Business and Administration students appeared slightly more positive than those from Social Sciences and Science and Technology, although the differences were not statistically significant.

Teachers and educators could apply digital learning models to improve engagement among students in field-specific learning environments by integrating technology-based activities, interactive tools, and collaborative platforms that align with the needs and characteristics of each discipline. Such an approach not only enhances student participation but also promotes active learning, critical thinking, and digital competence relevant to their field of study. Overall, students agreed that digital tools facilitated practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, reflecting the potential of digital empowerment to support English proficiency in UiTM Shah Alam context.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that digital empowerment plays a significant role in enhancing English language proficiency, particularly by fostering interactive learning through diverse resources in the modern educational context. It shows that students' ability to use digital tools wisely increases their motivation to improve their English proficiency. Through the findings collected, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant association between the two variables of gender and fields of study. Thus, gender does not influence fields of study and vice versa. However, female students demonstrate a stronger inclination towards utilising digital tools compared to male students when examining digital tool usage. Meanwhile, students' fields of study do play a role in influencing their English proficiency. Among the three focus fields of study, students from Business and Administration show a significantly higher amount of strong agreement that digital tools provide a positive influence on their English proficiency and literacy. In contrast, students from the Social Sciences and Science and Technology express some uncertainty regarding the usefulness of digital tools. Although they acknowledge that digital tools contribute to improving their English language skills, the observed influence is not as significant as that reported by Business and Administration students.

This study provides insights into how digital empowerment influences English proficiency among UiTM Shah Alam students. For students, the findings highlight the importance of integrating digital tools as interactive learning methods to strengthen language proficiency. For the university, the results suggest the need to expand digital learning infrastructure to support students from various fields in enhancing their language learning. At the policy level, the study emphasises the inclusion of digital tools in educational policies, particularly within language learning programmes. Overall, this study contributes to students, institutions, and policymakers by promoting the development of more proficient English language learners through the effective use of digital tools. Future research is encouraged to employ larger samples and incorporate qualitative perspectives, such as students' personal opinions on digital tools, to enrich the findings of similar studies. Future research is also recommended to explore why business students perceive digital tools as more beneficial than other groups in the field of study. In conclusion, the study highlights digital empowerment as a key factor in enhancing English proficiency and recommends its strategic integration into future language education practices and policies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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