

# The Impact of Digital Communication Tools on Language Learning Motivation

Fathia Ahmad Altweer\*, Randa Ramadan Abdelmawla

Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia, Zawia, Libya

\*fathiatouer@gmail.com

## Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of digital communication tools on language learning motivation among university learners. The researchers used a quantitative survey to collect data from 24 undergraduate students at the University of Zawia. The results indicate that YouTube and podcasts were the most popular tools. Conversation-based apps such as Tandem and HelloTalk, on the other hand, were not used at all. Most learners reported that digital tools are motivating and enjoyable, particularly when they include rewards such as streaks or badges. They also added that these apps are very useful for exam preparation. However, nearly half of the students complained about ads or social features, which distract them and cause them to struggle to stay motivated. The study concludes that digital tools are effective for boosting motivation, especially extrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, their design should be revised to reduce distractions and include more interactive elements. The findings offer practical recommendations for educators, app developers, and language learners.

**Keywords:** *digital communication tools, language learning, motivation, university students, extrinsic motivation*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Previous

It is obvious that learning has been revolutionized with the advent of technology, which facilitates the learning process. Learners all over the world take this opportunity to acquire and practice the language they are studying. Digital communication tools, such as apps (YouTube, social media platforms), increase learners' motivation by providing instant feedback and boosting their practice. Moreover, they offer real-time interaction with native speakers, connect learners globally, and, more importantly, adapt the learning process to each student's individual needs. As reported by Ryan and Deci (2000), the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) gives a key perspective for understanding motivation in language learning. This theory emphasizes the role of completing three fundamental psychological needs which are: autonomy, competence, and relatedness in supporting both intrinsic motivation and autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation. When these needs are satisfied, learners are more determined to eagerly participate in the language learning process.

However, despite these numerous benefits, digital communication tools also present some disadvantages. When overused, they may lead users to burnout. Additionally, learners may rely solely on these tools and avoid deeper learning, which can result in laziness.

Some studies have been done on digital tools' effectiveness in language learning, however, “fewer studies have specifically investigated their impact on learner motivation, a crucial factor for sustained success” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

This study is conducted to investigate how digital communication tools affect language learners' motivation. and identify best practices for maximizing their benefits.

### 1.2 Research questions:

1. How do digital communication tools influence motivation for language learning motivation?
2. What specific characteristics of digital tools such as gamification, social interaction, feedback mechanisms produce most motivation?
3. What problems do learners face when using digital communication tools, and how do these problems impact motivation?

### 1.3 Aims of the study

1. To investigate the relationship between digital communication tools and language learning motivation.
2. To find out which digital tools most effectively enhance motivation.
3. To study the potential barriers which may reduce motivation when using digital tools.
4. To suggest recommendations for the educational Board and developers on optimizing digital tools for motivational language learning.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

The researchers utilized a quantitative analysis survey to collect data to investigate the impact of digital communication tools on language learning motivation among university students. The survey is composed of a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). The survey assesses students' motivation levels, tool preferences, and perceived effectiveness.

### 2.2 Participants

Twenty-four undergraduate students from two different semesters: 5th semester (n=12) and 7th semester (n=12) : from the English Department, Faculty of Arts at Zawia University took part in the study. The participants were aged between 19 and 23 years at the time of data collection, and all were learning English as a foreign language.

### 2.3 Instrumentation

The researchers used a structured online questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consists of three sections:

Section A: Demographic information

Section B: Digital tool usage (types and frequency)

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Section C: Motivation statements (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and challenges)

Likert-scale items (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) were used to gather information in Section C.

## 2.4 Procedure

The link of the google form was distributed to the learners via WhatsApp and emails as the researchers already have course announcements groups with the students. Additionally, the learners were informed about the purpose of the study, the anonymity, the duration of the completion of the questionnaire, and they were told that there would be no compensation offered (participation was voluntary).

## 2.5 Data analysis:

All the twenty-four students from Al Zawia University (5<sup>th</sup> semester and 7<sup>th</sup> semester) completed the survey online. The collected data is analyzed using statistical methods such as regression analysis for survey responses.

## 3. Significance of Study

This research is important because:

- It assists the learners to understand how technology motivates language learning,
- It provides practical knowledge for educators to use digital tools effectively in language teaching.
- It suggests some recommendations to the app developers to create more attractive and motivated language learning platforms.
- It guides the language learners to choose which digital tools best support their motivational needs.

By examining the pros and cons of digital communication tools, this study aims to improve language learning experiences increasingly in the digital world.

## 4. Literature Review:

Nowadays, the learning process is greatly influenced by the integration of digital instruments which leads to the transformation of the traditional education process. Numerous researches were conducted on the effect of communication tools on language learning. These studies were done on experimental research and theoretical frameworks. A study done by Godwin-Jones (2018) on 'The incorporation of digital communication instruments in language learning' concluded that the digital tools used by the learners such as Duolingo, Babbel, social media platforms, and computer-mediated communication (CMC) are a good mean to boost the students' motivation by providing participatory, personalized, and independent learning experiences. Additionally, Ryan & Deci (2000) put forwards that intrinsic motivation is fostered when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Similarly, Zhao & Lai (2022) stated that Digital communication tools support these psychological needs by offering learner-centered environments. They explained that applications like game apps include rewards and they trace progress and improve the perceived competence. Also, Kabilan et al., (2010) explained that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter ease real interactions,

satisfying the learners' need for relatedness. Furthermore, Lee (2020) suggested that digital instruments increase the learners' engagement through active communication. Tools such as Zoom, Skype, and language exchange platforms (e.g., Tandem) give learners an opportunity to practice with native speakers, which helps to boost confidence and motivation. Besides, Hwang et al. (2021) added that when two or more tools coexist like discussion forums and chatbots they provide flexible learning opportunities, reduce anxiety and encourage the learners' participation. Additionally, Shadiev et al. (2026) in their systematic review on conversational AI tools, stated that improvements in learners' communication skills were followed by the progress of motivation and self-government across 31 reviewed studies. They added that these rational findings from multiple meta-analyses provide strong evidence that digital communication instruments can positively affect language learning motivation when appropriately performed.

While numerous research supports the idea that digital tools bring a big support to the learning process, some studies criticize this idea. Xiony and Teo (2025) suggested that digital tools do not affect all types of motivation equally. They additionally explained that these kinds of tools may be effective at improving the learning confidence in the learners' capacities, their visions of themselves as future successful language users, and their enjoyment of the learning process rather than altering more externally.

## 5. Challenges and Demotivating Factors

It is obvious that digital tools are a good mean to learn different subjects, not only the speaking skill. Different apps and various platforms bring comfort, and it is easy to acquire new languages, skills, and subjects. Despite their benefits, digital tools may also pose challenges. Stockwell (2022) states that over confidence in technological tools lead to superficial learning, and technical difficulties may dissatisfy the learners' progress. Additionally, Lai et al. (2018) explained that not all learners benefit equally; individual differences in digital knowledge and self-activation determine motivation levels.

## 6. Discussion of the survey

In response to the question "*Which digital tools do you use for language learning?*" (select all that apply), three students (12.5%) selected Duolingo or Babbel, two learners (8.3%) chose Zoom or Skype tutors, and none of the students (0%) selected Tandem or Hello Talk. The majority, which is thirteen students (54.2%), opted for YouTube or podcasts. Additionally, seven students (29.2%) selected the option "Other," while four students (16.7%) preferred to answer "None." When asked the question, "*How often do you use the tools mentioned above?*", a number of eight learners (33.3%) reported using them one to two times per week. Meanwhile, 16.5% stated they use them daily, 12.5% said they rarely use them, and another 12.5% indicated that they do not use them at all. Regarding the statement "*I enjoy using digital tools because they make learning fun,*" nine students (37.5%) strongly agreed, six learners (25%) agreed, five students (20%) remained neutral, three learners (12.5%) disagreed, and one student (4.2%) strongly disagreed.

Regarding the statement "*I feel a sense of accomplishment when completing lessons,*" nine students (37.5%) selected the **neutral** option, while the same number of learners (37.5%) **strongly agreed**. One student (4.2%), on the other hand, **strongly disagreed**. Additionally, three students (12.5%) **disagreed**, and two students (8.3%) **agreed**.

Concerning the statement *"I use these tools even when not required,"* six learners (25%) **strongly agreed**, while the same number of students (25%) **strongly disagreed**. Moreover, three learners (12.5%) **disagreed**, and one student (4.2%) **agreed**.

Regarding **extrinsic motivation**, when responding to the statement *"I use apps primarily to earn rewards (e.g., streaks, badges),"* seven learners (29.2%) **strongly disagreed**, while eight students (33.3%) **strongly agreed**. Additionally, four learners (16.7%) chose the **neutral** option, five students (20%) **agreed**, and no one (0%) **disagreed**.

In response to the statement *"External recognition (e.g., leaderboards) motivates me,"* seven learners (29.2%) selected **neutral**, while three students (12.5%) **strongly disagreed**, and another three (12.5%) **disagreed**. Additionally, five students (20.8%) **agreed**, and six students (25%) **strongly agreed**.

Regarding the statement *"I learn to meet goals like exams or job requirements,"* four students (16.7%) selected **strongly disagree**, and one learner (4.2%) **disagreed**, while three students (12.5%) chose **neutral**. Although eight students (33.3%) selected 'agree', an **equal** number of learners (33.3%) chose 'strongly agree'.

**Regarding the statement, "I actively seek conversations with native speakers (online),"** 4 students (16.7%) strongly disagreed, while the majority of 8 learners (33.3%) strongly agreed, and 7 students (29.2%) chose the neutral option. Additionally, 4 learners (16.7%) agreed, and only one student (4.2%) disagreed.

**Referring to the statement, "I get distracted by non-learning features (e.g., ads, social media),"**

8 learners (33.3%) opted for neutral, 6 students (25%) agreed, and the same number strongly agreed. Moreover, 2 students (8.3%) strongly disagreed, and the same number disagreed.

**Finally, concerning the statement, "I struggle to stay motivated without human interaction,"**

the majority of students (10, or 41.7%) preferred the neutral option, 6 learners (25%) strongly disagreed, 5 students (20%) agreed, while 2 (8.3%) strongly agreed, and only one learner disagreed.

## 7. Findings

The study investigates the impact of digital communication tools on language learning motivation, indicates the following:

### 1. Favorite Tools and their frequent Usage

- YouTube and podcasts were the most popular tools (54.2%), while apps like Duolingo/Babbel (12.5%) and tutor platforms (8.3%) were less common. Notably, conversational apps (e.g., Tandem, HelloTalk) were unused (0%). Therefore, their frequent usage varied by 33.3% used tools 1 to 2 times weekly, while 16.5% engaged daily. However, 12.5% rarely or never used them.

### 2. Intrinsic Motivation

Concerning the entertainment and the Accomplishment, 62.5% agreed/strongly agreed that digital tools make learning fun, though 16.7% disagreed While 37.5% felt a strong sense of achievement, an equal percentage were neutral, indicating mixed emotional engagement. Additionally, only 29.2% used tools beyond requirements, with 25% strongly disagreeing.

### 3. Extrinsic Motivation

- Regarding the rewards: 53.3% of the learners were motivated by rewards (e.g., streaks, badges), however, 29.2% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 45.8% were motivated by the Leaderboards, yet 25% were indifferent or demotivated, and 66.6% used tools for exams/job requirements, showing strong extrinsic motivation.

### 4. Challenges

50% of the participants acknowledged distractions from ads or social features, weakening their focus. Moreover, 41.7% were neutral about needing human interaction, however, 28.3% declared that they are demotivated without it, i.e. human interaction plays an essential role for some learners.

### 8. Implications:

The Education Board should integrate human-centered digital tools (e.g., tutor sessions, language exchange platforms) to complement passive learning. Additionally, App developers could minimize distractions to help the learners to achieve their goal.

### 9. Limitations and Future Research:

The minimal size (n=24) is not enough to generalize. It can restrict the impreciseness of the finding. Future studies could explore more about motivation patterns and tool preferences depending on the culture, age, ethnic, and sex. Moreover, the findings may be variable to other educational settings as the study is conducted only in a single university context.

### 10. Conclusion

This study highlights the role of digital instruments in shaping motivation in language learning. Much research has proved that the incorporation of digital tools into the language learning process is a great success. The platforms like social media and apps based on games, or language learning exchange such as Duolingo and Babel foster encouragement for many learners, their effectiveness is uneven. These tools strength the learners' motivation particularly extrinsically. However, some studies show that there are gaps regarding apps like You Tube which rely on passive content. This suggests a lack of opportunities for interactive practice. Therefore, the distractions and the need for human interaction further hinder sustained motivation.

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