Original Article   **https://hnpublisher.com**

An Analysis of Students' Perception on the Use of MS Teams Reading Progress by English Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The present study explores the Foundation level students' perception regarding English teachers' integration of MS Teams Reading Progress to improve their reading and pronunciation skills at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al-Musannah (UTAS-A), Oman.

Methodology: The study was quantitative in nature and a questionnaire was distributed among the students of Level 4 and Level 2 to seek their perceptions about the MS Teams Reading Progress as a tool for improving their reading abilities, comprehension, pronunciation, and overall language proficiency.

Findings: The data analysis indicates a strong positive response as most of them recognized enhancement in their reading skills, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress.

Conclusion: This study provides a valuable insight into students' perceptions about MS Teams Reading Progress as a tool for improving reading abilities, comprehension, pronunciation and overall language proficiency. The data collected indicate a strong positive response, and majority recognized enhancement in their reading skills, grammar, and confidence in speaking English with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress. 65% of respondents, specifically, agreed that their reading ability and comprehension improved, and similar trends were observed in perceptions of grammar and language proficiency. Besides the overall positive perception of the students, the study also identified some areas for further research as a notable percentage of students involved in the study expressed neutrality about their experiences with pronunciation and MS Teams Reading Progress' ability to address individual learning needs.

Keywords: MS Teams, MS Teams Reading Progress, ELT, AI, Students' Perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

An educational process aims at the transmission of knowledge, instructions, and skills. Over time, the means of transmission of knowledge have evolved. The role of Information Technology (IT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is on rise in education across academic world at a high speed and it rose especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. More teachers and students are becoming familiar with the use of technology in the classroom and beyond. According to Cathy and Lalani (2020), the education sector is to receive $350 million of investment by 2025. This investment is being made in the integration of advanced technology to take the teaching-learning experience to the next level. Benson (2002) regards online learning as the updated and refined version of distance learning (Safdar and khan, 2020; Safdar et al., 2020).

AI (Artificial Intelligence) helps teachers to enhance students' learning in English Language Classrooms (Ayala-Pazmiño et al., 2023). This era is called the era of AI, and everyone is intrigued to know more about AI, what AI can do for them. Who can get help from the AI? How can teachers use AI in the classroom? With the arrival of AI tools, especially ChatGPT which has made it easy to answer any question before and during the classroom. Another AI powered tool is Microsoft Teams (MS) Reading Progress, it has made convenient for the teachers to assign student reading aloud activities and they can monitor the reading done by students and give appropriate feedback as well. MS Teams is an application based on cloud computing that keeps the apps, conversations, meetings and files of the students and teachers in one place. Another usage of Reading Progress in MS Teams is that it helps the teachers to identify pronunciation mistakes of the students without listening to the whole text spoken by the students, thus saving a lot of time and effort for the teachers. According to Alameri, et al. (2020), Microsoft Teams has improved communication between teachers and students, classroom organization, timetabling, and the teachers' ability to grade and monitor the learners' activities and assignments with the help of MS Assignments and MS Teams Reading Progress.

English Language is learnt in a set of 4 skills. These are Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking skills. The students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah (UTAS-A) learn English language skill wise. They learn English at 4 levels. With the new advancement in the field of technology, the English language teachers are using the latest tools to engage their students and keep them motivated in the language classes. It is known that the integration of information technology has become pivotal in the field of English language teaching. The arrival of the computer has made language teaching easy and more effective. In UTAS-A, all the language classrooms are equipped with computers, projectors, and wall mount speakers. Teachers use electronic copies of books and PPTs to teach the learners.

The students in UTAS-A join the Foundation program after their school and they study English for 4 levels. The teachers use different AI tools in the class and students know about AI and its usage in the class. The students use MS Reading Progress tool to read for pronunciation. It is an AI tool that helps students and teachers know the performance of the students.

This study aims to know the perception of the students on the use of AI tools by the teachers in the classroom. The following are the research questions:

1. How far are the students satisfied with the use of MS Teams Reading Progress to enhance their reading and speaking proficiency?

2. To what extent does the evaluation done by MS Teams Reading Progress help the students improve their pronunciation?

3. What is the student's perception of language proficiency with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various research studies have shown that among the four language skills students find speaking the most challenging one. According to Kelsen (2019), the students face speaking anxiety when they are asked to complete the task in front of the class, or for presentation to complete other unplanned performance. Students feel speaking anxiety while facing pronunciation difficulties and they are sometime afraid of peer embarrassment due to the errors (Tisma, 2022).

Online learning means the use of the internet and an electronic device to learn and study (Carliner, 2004). Ally (2008) described the benefits of online learning for students and teachers. For example, it is quite convenient for the students to access learning materials, and they can do their homework and assignment whenever and wherever they want to do it. On the other hand, teachers can teach students and assign homework from any place. Microsoft Teams platform is accessible online and offline as well. (Poston, et al., 2019). Hussein et al. (2020) think online platforms are useful in learning a foreign language. Prastikawati (2019) mentioned that online language learning is getting attention in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The recent pandemic of Covid-19 shifted the classroom online for teachers and students. Microsoft Teams became a valuable tool in conducting classes online and connecting to the students.

Microsoft Teams Reading Progress falls into the category of Computer Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) (Henrichsen, 2021). The post Covid-19 era has seen a significant increase in the use of online resources for the students and teachers and mostly they are based on AI (artificial intelligence) said by Mathew (2024). According to Dedja (2015), advancements in technology have widened the horizons for students and teachers in language education. Technology has allowed the students and teachers to continue the process of learning and teaching inside and outside the classroom. Naqvi (2020) thinks AI (Artificial intelligence) is present in every field of life, for example, in engineering, business, medicine and education. According to Chang and Lu (2019), AI tools provide enough technological support to students to enhance personalized learning. A study conducted by Gayathri (2020) revealed that MS Teams was an e-learning platform that was among the most chosen and the most preferred by the students and the academic institutions for online learning and mixed-mode learning. Prasetya (2024), is of the view that Microsoft Teams-Reading Progress technology is quite useful for the students as it allows them to practice speaking skills. He also mentioned that Reading Progress Microsoft Teams is helping the students to improve their speaking abilities and behavior. Apple's Siri and Google Speech Recognition (GSR) were examined by Savithi and Suttidee (2020). Their finding was that GSR was much simpler and more accurate to transcribe the speech of English Language Learners. Krishna et al (2019), found that Speech Recognition tool helps students to practice speaking, and it was quite helpful for the students to overcome speaking anxiety and improve speaking proficiency.

With online learning tools, especially in EFL, many institutions are trying to use them to enhance their students' ability to speak specially. Microsoft Teams (MS) is the official channel for the UTAS-A to communicate between the students and the teachers. MS Teams has many features and the one that is the focus of this research is the MS Teams Reading Progress that is being used by the teachers of English to improve the reading and speaking ability of their students. The current study focuses on the students' perception about the use of MS Teams Reading Progress by their teachers.
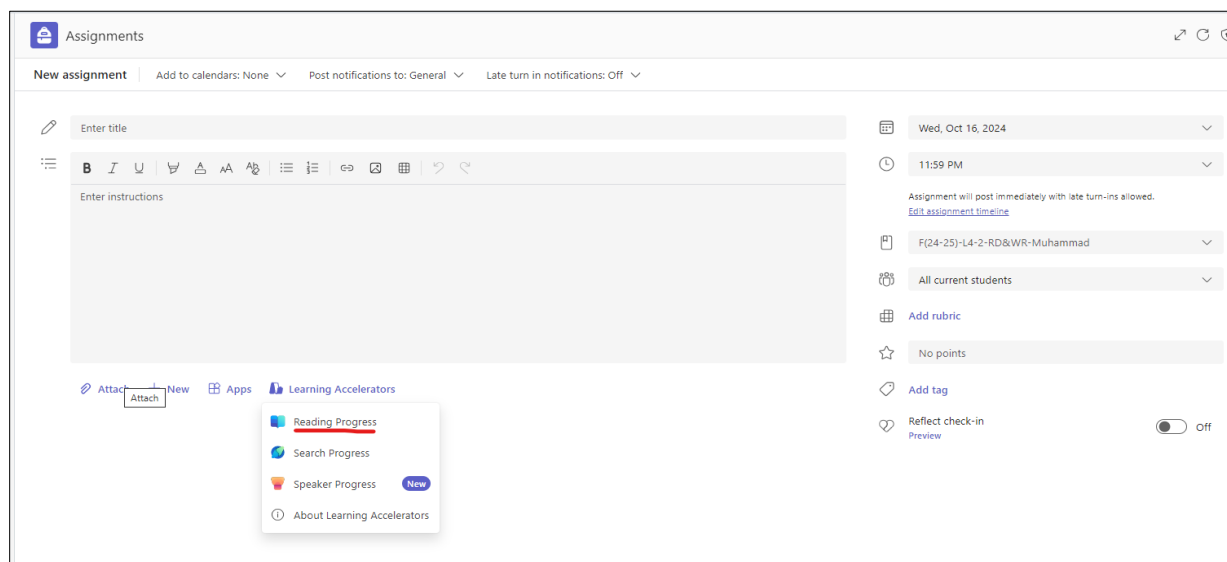
3. RESEARCH SETTING

This study is conducted at the UTAS-A where Microsoft (MS) Teams and related applications have been used since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, to conduct online classes. Lecturers and students are given official email addresses and access to MS Teams.

All the students at the UTAS-A take English as a mandatory subject, and they are placed in foundation program. The textbooks used for students are the Pathways Series 1 and 3 for level 2 and level consecutively. The text would be taken from the Reading book and allocated to the students to read it
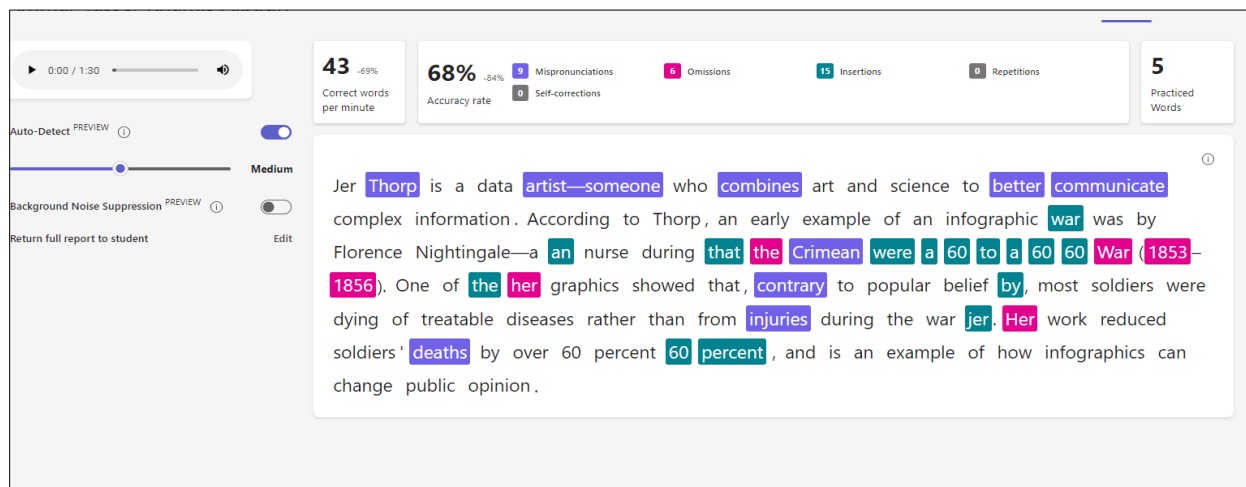
aloud. The lessons were saved as MS Word files in each class's teaching teams. The length of the lesson ranged from 150 to 200 words. The files were assigned to the students using Assignment features. There is a learning accelerator specially designed to analyze the students' reading and pronunciation ability. The assignments were set by setting the parameters of Title, Reading Level, Genre, time limit, pronunciation sensitivity, reading coach and an optional criterion for adding comprehension. The assignments were timed, and students were informed about them and the assignments were assigned to all the students in each group automatically. All the students used MS Teams application on the phone, or they could complete the assignment by using the web browser. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1:

At the end of the submission deadline, the lecturer checks the MS Teams Assignment, writes notes on the work of the students, and awards them the marks for completing the assignment. The students would receive an automatic analysis of their work based on the criteria set by AI technology embedded in the MS Teams Reading Progress. This would allow the students to know their reading speed (correct words per minutes), accuracy percentage (accuracy rate) with an analysis of mispronunciations, insertions, self-corrections, omission, and repetitions. Moreover, the system automatically suggests 5 words for students to practice pronunciation. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2:

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study was conducted in UTAS Al-Musannah campus in the South Al Batinah Region of Sultanate of Oman. This is mixed method research. This method was used to analyze the perception of the students about the usage of MS Teams Reading progress in the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al-Musannah campus, in Oman.

This study explores the students' perception of using MS Teams Reading accelerator to improve reading skill and pronunciation. A questionnaire was formulated and distributed among the students of Level 4 and Level 2 in the Preparatory Studies Center on the campus during the academic year 2023-24. The teaching and learning schedule are for 15 weeks per semester. The students were divided into males and females' categories. 39 students were from Level 4 and 27 students were from Level 2. 16 female students were from Level 4, while 23 were males from Level 4. There were 11 female students from Level 2, while 16 males were from Level 2. The validity of the questionnaire was revised and reviewed by the Research Committee of the UTAS Al Musannah. Male and female students were the participants as they were the focus of the study. The questionnaire's population was the students enrolled in the second semester of Academic Year 2023-24. All the students who participated in the questionnaire were given assignments for reading on the Microsoft Teams. The questions were closed questions, and they were MCQs. The questions had 5 options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Interviews were also conducted to verify the questionnaire's validity. Only 4 students were asked for the interview, and they were selected randomly from Level 2 and Level 4.

Ethical considerations were considered throughout the whole study, and all the students were informed before their interviews that their interviews were only for the research purposes and the questionnaire was also shared with research department of the university to curb any ethical violations.

There were certain limitations, as this study did not include the English teachers of all levels of PSC and only 4 students were interviewed. So, the findings may not represent the perception of most students in PSC about the MS Teams Reading. However, it was made sure that all the participants had knowledge about the purposes of this study.

The survey was sent to the students via MS Forms. The response rate was more than 50% for Level 4 and Level 2 students. The data was analyzed on MS Forms using the number of respondents and corresponding percentages.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Students' perception on the improvement of reading ability and comprehension

The data collected for survey question "MS Teams Reading Progress has improved my reading ability and comprehension", showed that majority of the students 65% agreed that MS Reading Progress improved their reading ability and comprehension. 21% of the students remained neutral about the role of MS Teams Reading Progress for the improvement of reading ability and comprehension. 6% of the users strongly agreed that this application improved reading ability and comprehension. However, 8% of the students disagreed about the improvement in reading and comprehension with the help of the reading progress.

5.2 Students' perception on getting the useful feedback from MS Teams Reading

The survey question "I believe that MS Teams Reading Progress provides useful feedback," gave a useful insight into the students' perception about the feedback from MS Teams Reading. 53% of the respondents agreed that they believed that they got useful feedback from MS Teams Reading Progress. Similarly, 12% strongly agreed with the same. 24% (16 out of 66) of the students remained neutral about the efficacy of the feedback. However, only 11 percent of the students disagreed that they did not find the feedback useful from MS Teams Reading Progress.

5.3 Students' perception on improvement of confidence to speak English

The results for the survey question "MS Teams Reading Progress has improved my confidence to speak English", indicate the improvement of confidence to speak English. Only 8% of the respondents disagreed that MS Teams Reading has improved their confidence to speak English. 38% agreed and 17% strongly agreed that MS Teams Reading has improved their confidence, and it shows that more than 50% of the respondents felt improvement in their confidence to speak English. However, 33% of the population remained neutral.

5.4 Students' perception on improvement of pronunciation in English

The survey question "I think using MS Teams Reading Progress has enhanced my pronunciation in English", asked the students about their perception in the improvement of pronunciation of English language. The results showed that 50% of the students agreed that they felt that MS Teams Reading Progress had improved their pronunciation of English. 32% of the students remained neutral about the enhancement in pronunciation while 17% disagreed with the improvement in pronunciation.

5.5 Students' perception on improvement of grammar of English

The survey question focused on the improvement in grammar of English, "MS Teams Reading Progress has improved my grammar." 60% of the students agreed that they felt improvement in the grammar of English with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress. 27% of the students remained neutral and only 12% of the students disagreed with improvement in grammar of English because of MS Teams Reading Progress.

5.6 Students' perception on addressing the learning needs and challenges

The survey question "MS Teams Reading Progress has addressed my learning needs and challenges," focused on the opinion of the students about their perception about the addressing of learning needs and challenges. 57% of the students agreed that MS Teams Reading Progress had addressed their learning needs and challenges. While 12% of respondents disagreed with this notion and 30% of the students remained neutral.

5.7 Students' perception on improvement of language proficiency

The survey question "MS Teams Reading Progress has helped me to improve my language proficiency," asked about the perception of the students about the improvement of language proficiency because of MS Teams Reading Progress. 61 percent of the students agreed that they felt improvement in their language proficiency because of MS Teams Reading Progress. 15% of the students disagreed with the statement and 24% of the students remained neutral.

5.8 Students' satisfaction with MS Teams Reading Progress

The last question of the survey, "I am satisfied with MS Teams Reading Progress", focused on the satisfaction of the students with the Reading Progress. 61% of the students agreed that they were satisfied with the MS Teams Reading Progress. 15% of the respondents said that they were not satisfied with the Reading Progress, while 24% of the respondents remained neutral.

5.9 Students' perception on the ease of using MS Teams Reading Progress

Students were asked, "It is easy to submit MS Teams Reading Progress Assignments". 68% of the population agreed that it was easy to submit the assignments on MS Teams Reading Progress. Only 8% disagreed and mentioned that they did not agree about the ease of submission of assignments on MS Teams Reading Progress. 24% of the population remained neutral while answering this question.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of MS Teams Reading Progress in enhancing their reading abilities, comprehension, pronunciation, grammar and overall language proficiency. Approximately 65% students agreed that they felt an improvement in their reading ability and comprehension, this indicates that the MS Teams Reading Progress has the capacity to effectively support literacy development and language improvement in the language institutions. This notion agrees with existing literature suggesting that technology-enhanced learning tools such as MS Teams Reading Progress can positively impact reading skills by providing immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences (e.g., Smith & Jones, 2020).

On the side of the feedback, more than half (53%) of students felt that MS Teams Reading Progress provided useful feedback, with an additional 12% mentioned that they strongly agreed. This gives the insight that students understand the value of the formative assessment features of the platform, which can help them identify their areas for improvement in learning the language. However, 24% of the respondents recorded a neutral response that indicates there is a need for further exploration into how feedback is understood and utilized by students for language improvement.

Confidence in speaking English language emerged as another important outcome, with 55% of students agreeing that they felt improvement in their confidence to speak English fluently. This is a significant notion, and it shows the correlation between language proficiency and self-efficacy in language learning. There were only (8%) who disagreed with this phenomenon, as most of them felt the usage of MS Teams Reading Progress contributed positively to improving their spoken. On the other hand, 33% of neutral responses create an alarm, that highlights a group of students from the respondents who may not experience the same level of confidence boost.

Regarding pronunciation, the findings indicate that 50% of students felt an improvement in their pronunciation because of MS Teams Reading Progress. While 32% of the students remained neutral and, this neutral response raises concerns over the feedback given by MS Teams Reading Progress. Effective communication requires better pronunciation skills and MS Teams Reading Progress is a valuable source in addressing the needs of all learners.

Improvements in grammar were reported by 60% of respondents, this reinforced that structured practice could lead to greater grammatical accuracy among the students with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress. However, 12% disagreed and the 27% who were neutral, this indicates that some students and respondents may require additional resources or different instructional approaches to get similar advantages.

The notion that MS Teams Reading Progress addresses not only learning needs, but challenges as well was supported by 57% of the population. This percentage suggests that the MS Teams platform's adaptive features may effectively cater to diverse learning styles and challenges, though the 30% neutral responses point to a group of students who may not fully engage with the tools and chances available to them.

The improvement in language proficiency was agreed by 61% of students, this confirms the efficacy of MS Teams Reading Progress. Additionally, the high satisfaction rate (61%) among the population indicates that students appreciate the features of MS Teams Reading Progress. However, only 15% of respondents who expressed their dissatisfaction revealed certain areas for enhancement, which could be addressed through students' feedback sessions.

Lastly, the ease in the usage of MS Teams Reading Progress is supported by a significant majority (68%) who agreed that submitting assignments was a straightforward and an effortless process. This high rate of agreement among platform users emphasizes the importance of user-friendly design in educational technology, which enhances users' engagement and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, many students reported positive feedback about MS Teams Reading Progress in various aspects of their language learning process. However, there is a portion of students who expressed their neutrality or dissatisfaction about certain features. Future researchers could explore the factors contributing to these varied perceptions and investigate strategies to enhance user experience and effectiveness.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides a valuable insight into students' perceptions about MS Teams Reading Progress as a tool for improving reading abilities, comprehension, pronunciation and overall language proficiency. The data collected indicate a strong positive response, and majority recognized enhancement in their reading skills, grammar, and confidence in speaking English with the help of MS Teams Reading Progress. 65% of respondents, specifically, agreed that their reading ability and comprehension improved, and similar trends were observed in perceptions of grammar and language proficiency. The feedback mechanism of MS Teams Reading Progress is also taken as a significant factor, which was found useful by over half of the students in the study. This highlights the importance of constructive feedback about students' engagement in MS Teams Reading Progress and facilitating the learning.

Other than the overall positive reception from the students, the study also identified some areas for further research. A notable percentage of students involved in the study expressed neutrality about their experiences with pronunciation and MS Teams Reading Progress' ability to address individual learning needs. This suggests that while the tool is effective for many, some users may require better and personalized support to get full benefits from its features.

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