EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON PEER RELATIONSHIPS 
AND INTERPERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG 
TESL TRAINEES OF IPG KAMPUS IPOH 

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Abstract 

This paper discusses the effects of communication technology on peer relationships and their interpersonal understanding among TESL trainees of IPG Kampus Ipoh. This study adopted a qualitative case study method to achieve the research objectives. A set of questionnaires were distributed and an interview session was carried out with the respective respondents. The findings revealed that technology has strongly made an impact on the way the trainees communicate and also affected their peer relationships and interpersonal understanding. Technology has also brought positive and negative effects to the life of these trainees. The trainees claimed that they can communicate more frequently and information travel at a faster speed too. On the other hand, technology has also affected them especially when stalkers and cyber bullies have made their life become miserable. Thus, as future teachers, the trainees should understand the need to manage and balance their communication so they would gain benefit from these communication technologies. 

Keywords: Effects of technology, peer relationships, interpersonal understanding. 

Abstrak 

pelatih harus mengurus dan menyeimbangkan komunikasi mereka agar mendapat faedah daripada penggunaan teknologi komunikasi ini.

**Kata Kunci**: Kesan teknologi, hubungan rakan sebaya, pemahaman interpersonal.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Research Background**

Tom Hanks, the actor in Cast Away movie (2000), would very much disagree with John Donne. Tom survived after being stranded alone in a deserted island. He got through all the obstacles, hardships and loneliness for his own survival. Though it was merely a movie, Tom Hanks has shown that without a companion and without in contact with another human being, he could still be alive. He found his own way to keep on living. However, can that ever happen to normal human beings like us? Can we survive without someone to talk to or do we go crazy without our phone and without *whatsapping* others?

Naturally, every normal human being needs companions. Even a new born baby needs one. Unlike Tom Hanks, we cannot live without communicating with others. Thank you to the advancement of technology, communication among human has now been made a lot easier and distance made closer. In 1999, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft Corporation, applauded the arrival of the second decade of the 21st century and he warned that from then on information has been globalized, digitized, and sped up to move at the speed of thought (Gates, 1999). How does that statement affects our relationship with others?

With specific reference to relationships, communication technology has really made peer relationships to become closer. People have become more connected. The inventions of new telecommunication gadgets such as smartphones and tablets and faster internet speed have improved many aspects of relationships. With this rapid improvement, information can be exchanged in a glimpse of the eye, social activities among peers can be quickly arranged and online group discussions can also be carried out through various modes (Omrod, 2014). In short, peer relationships have really benefited from the modern technology.

**Statement Of The Problem**

Interpersonal skills are fundamental to develop successful relationships at home, school, work and socially. The rapid development of technology, has seen people progressively moving from traditional letter writing to text messaging, e-mails, instant messaging, and social networking sites in order to communicate with each other (Cyr, Berman & Smith, 2015).
A survey carried out in 2012 by MCMC's Handphone Users in Malaysia had shown that people aged 15 to 24 made up almost 29 per cent of mobile phone users in the country. According to the Economic Report for 2013/2014, the number of subscribers for internet in Malaysia will reach to 25 million mark in the following three years (The Nielsen Company, 2015). This analysis could infer that Malaysians are busy building and mending communication ties either for official or casual reasons.

Although it is hard to determine the exact data of teenagers owning smartphones or subscribing the internet, the effects of technology on their relationship with their peer and interpersonal understanding can be both heart-warming and alarming at the same time. It is undeniable that these communication technologies are widely associated with the adolescents but little is known on their effects on peer relationship and interpersonal understanding. Thus, this report plans to investigate on the effects of technology on the peer relationships and personal understanding of students in higher institutions.

**Aims Of The Report**

This research objectives

i. To determine if technology has effects on the peer relationship and interpersonal understanding among PISMP TESL Semester 7 students.

ii. To explore how the use of technology help PISMP TESL Semester 7 students in developing their peer relationship and interpersonal understanding.

iii. To identify the major effects of technology on PISMP TESL Sem 7 students’ peer relationship and interpersonal understanding.

**Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

i. Does technology has effects on the peer relationship and interpersonal understanding among PISMP TESL Semester 7 students?

ii. How does the use of technology help PISMP TESL Sem 7 students in developing their peer relationship and interpersonal understanding?

iii. What are the major effects of technology on PISMP TESL Sem 7 students’ peer relationship and interpersonal understanding?
LITERATURE REVIEW

Peers play a significant role in a child’s personal and social development. Studies done by Brown, Baken, Ameringer and Mahon (2008) and Ryan (2000), managed to reveal that having good relationship with peers will help to mould the child’s belief and behaviour (Omrod, 2014). Children who start having peers early in life for example during their nursery or pre-school would cope better with their peers when they grow up and show better achievement academically and socially as reported by Gest, Domitrovich and Welsh (2005); Patrick, Anderman & Ryan (2002); Pellegrini & Bohn (2005) in Omrod (2014). The relationships with peers too will give them sufficient platform to learn about giving cooperation, compromising, or building interpersonal skills (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz & Buskirk, 2006). On the other hand, these researchers also claimed that young children with difficulties getting along with their peers will normally have to face “clinically significant behavioural and affective disorders” (Parker et al., 2006).

Maintaining peer relationships will require effort from all parties involved. One of the communication tools used by peers is technology. As a communication tool, technology can both build and break relationships because there are also pros and cons in using technology as a medium of communication. Regarding to the use of technology among children or even adolescents, parental guidance and discipline are very much necessary for optimal personal and social development (Omrod, 2014). The different types of parenting styles would produce different effect on their children. Being overly permissive, would produce children who are immature and impulsive. Hence, these children might not be able to handle technology well and be spoiled by the technology itself.

Teenagers and adolescents can be categorised as heavy users of newer electronic forms of communication such as instant messaging, e-mail, and text messaging, as well as communication-oriented Internet sites such as blogs, social networking, and sites for sharing photos and videos (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In their study, both authors found that adolescents were using these communication tools mainly to strengthen existing relationships, both with friends and romantic partner. With specific reference to peer relationships, there is a great deal of research that has been done to investigate the effects of communication technology on teenagers’ peer relationships. Many of the researchers have found positive effects of communication technology towards the teenagers. For instance, Mikami et al., (2010) reported that youths who had been better adjusted at ages 13–14 years when using the technology were more likely to be using social networking web for beneficial purposes compared to those who did not.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a case study design. Yin (2009) and Creswell (2007) mentioned that case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a case or multiple cases over time, involving multiple sources of information, for example, through observations, interviews, documents and reports.

Specifically, for this research, only questionnaires and interview sessions were carried out in order to collect data. As previously mentioned, this research aims to look at the effects of technology on peer relationship and personal understanding. The research design of this study can be seen in Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1. Research Design On The Effects Of Technology On Peer Relationships And Personal Understanding Among Students](image)

Population Sample

This study involved 15 TESL trainees from IPG Kampus Ipoh. The participants were purposively selected as they met the requirement of students from higher institutions and they are active users of the technology for their daily communication either with their parents, lecturers or friends. There were three males and twelve females involved as participants in this study.
**Research Instruments**

Two types of instruments were used in this study: questionnaires and interviews. A set of questionnaires consists of two parts. Part 1 consists of three questions and requires respondents to provide demographic information. Part 2 contains seven questions and requires respondents to provide information on their communication preference and describe their usage of communication technology. Five interview questions were designed to gather information on the effects of technology on peer relationships and personal understanding.

**Data Collection**

The data for this study were collected from the questionnaire which was administered to all respondents. For the questionnaire, all the respondents were gathered and briefed on the objective of the study. They took about 5-7 minutes to complete all the questions.

Due to availability of time, only three respondents were able to be interviewed and willingly shared their opinions on the study. The whole session, which was about 10 mins per individual/session, was recorded and coding process was done.

**Data Analysis**

The data were collected from the questionnaires and the interview. All data from the questionnaires were analysed using the statistical analysis: percentage and mean, in which the researcher is identifying the communication preference of the respondents. The data from the interview session were coded and categorised under similar themes and presented.

**FINDINGS**

Table 1: **The Demographic Profile Of The Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/ Race</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: 
Communication Preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/Preference</th>
<th>Face to face</th>
<th>Social Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses showed that all the male students prefer to communicate face to face compared social media such as the Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, majority of the females too seemed to prefer communicating face to face. On the other hand, only 4 or 33% of the females preferred to use the social media.

When the question was asked as to why they prefer to communicate face to face, the answers given were:
- More fun
- More reliable
- To see the real emotions and expressions of both speakers
- To avoid miscommunication

When the question was asked as to why they prefer to use social media, the answers given were:
- When they want to avoid meeting the other party
- Can have more time to think before responding
- Fast and efficient
- Saves time

Students’ View Of Peer Relationships And Interpersonal Understanding

Majority of the respondents claimed that they have very positive relationships with their peers and that has helped to develop their interpersonal understanding. Since the respondents are all future teachers to be, this positive development is much needed as they are becoming role-models once they enter their teaching career. According to Gottman (1986) and Suttles (1970), having close friendships will help foster self-esteem and a general sense of well-being among the peers (Ormrod, 2014). Besides that, these students too will improve on perspective-taking and conflict resolution skills (Bukowski, Motzoi & Meyer, 2009).

However, the respondents agreed that having cliques do affect their relationships with their peers. They claimed that when they are attached to a certain group of friends or cliques, their friends who do not belonged to the cliques would feel left out as cliques have “fairly rigid and exclusive” membership (Brown, 2011).
In addition, the respondents also agreed that gangs should not be encouraged among teenagers and students. Gang members are normally governed by certain strict rules for behaviour and normally they are infamously known for violations (Ormrod, 2014). Thus teachers in schools should have initiatives to condone this gang activity before they become worst. Teachers should identify those potential gang members and support them to achieve academically or develop their true abilities. A teacher can make the difference.

The Effect Of Technology In Their Personal Life

All the three interviewees agreed that technology has really brought positive impact on their personal life. Communication has been made easier as they were able to contact their family members in the hometown using the technology such as the smartphone that everyone owns and also using social media such as the facebook and instagram.

They were very happy with this situation as information too is at the finger-tips although the reliability and validity of the information is at times questionable. Internet-based chat room also allows them to have group discussions about virtually any topic. These mechanisms, according to Valkenburg & Peter (2009) will enhance their self-esteem, connectedness with peers, social problem solving and general psychological well-being (Ormrod, 2014).

The Influence Of Technology On Students’ Relationship With Their Peers

The respondents found that technology has really helped them to have a harmonious relationships with their peers. With the advancement of smartphone technology, text messaging software, and convenient access to the internet, many students now communicate quite frequently. They communicated to as many as 200-300 exchanges using the whatsapp application. However, this quick and easy access to communicate do have its negative effects too. The students also have conflicts evolved from the many exchanges per day.

Issues And Challenges Of Technology

Besides all the good and positive effects of technology, it has the bad and negative effects too. Technology and internet, unfortunately, has opened opportunities for stalkers and cyber bullies to exist. These respondents claimed that they too did receive humiliating video footage or hostile messages from unknown senders. How did these cyber bullies get their victims’ email and facebook addresses in the first place?
In Malaysia itself, there are many cyber scams which were reported in the mass media. Most of the scams were reported to the authority but some were left unreported due to lack of evidence. Female teenagers normally become the target of these scams. At this stage, teachers should play their role in combating this issue from getting more severe which could affect the students’ well-being. Students should be made to aware of the consequences of getting involved in the cyber crimes.

CONCLUSION

Technology has various effects on the peer relationships and their interpersonal understanding. The technology, specifically the communication technology, could either build or break relationships. People can have conflicts over the phone and through facebook. On the positive side, people from different continents can exchange information, opinions and ideas, may it good or bad, in a short time. This makes life much easier. However, there is need to be highlighted that electronic communication may also reinforce peer communication at the expense of communication with parents. Thus, the teenagers themselves need to manage and balance their communication so they will not be wasting their time on these communication technology.

REFERENCES


