Introduction

The importance of language and communication in general and English language in particular has been realized for long. However, the actual inclusion of English language and communication in academia at primary, secondary, senior secondary and tertiary level has faced numerous challenges. Moreover, the methods used to teach and train students in English language and make them efficient in communication skills, are a subject of debate. Similarly, the weightage given to English language and communication in the mainstream courses in higher education is also debatable. This is particularly true when it comes to the training of students of Engineering, Science and Technology disciplines. English language and communication courses are still seen and treated as supplementary parts of the core disciplinary courses. Communication skills courses in the context of this study refer to those courses which are designed for the undergraduate students of Engineering and Technology. In most universities, students are offered one or two courses related to either English language skills or communication skills. At the same time, industry treats the communication skills as mandatory skills. The aspiration of the 'digital native' generation of students, demands new pedagogy and modules for acquiring skills based learning. 'Digital natives' refer to the group of users who are born and brought up in such conditions where technology is an integral part of their daily routine (Prensky, 2001). This is where new media technologies can come in handy, particularly, the Internet Based Platforms (Milrad, 2005).

There is an emphasis on the inclusion of technology intervention in education at all levels. As stated in the National Education Policy (NEP) draft, "ICTs can also be harnessed for remedial education, training of teachers, adult literacy programmes, skill education, learning tool in higher education and also as a governance and management tool" (NEP 2016, p.27). The draft states

that 'Digital Literacy' should be imparted to the students from fifth grade onwards. Section 4.9 in the National Education policy, 2016 exclusively discusses the need and importance of ICT.

ICTs can help adult learners, socially backward learners, specially challenged learners, and similar other group/groups of people who are deprived from the basic education and skills due to certain reasons. Similarly, several ICT applications are available and can be used for monitoring the performance of the learners. There are other applications which can be used for the evaluation part of education. Particularly, there is a special stress on Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and the Learning Management System (LMS) since it solves the issues of accessibility and affordability because of its low cost.

There are abundant studies available which focuses on the usage and benefits of internet, and allied technologies in the education domain. This study explored the motivational reasons behind this abundant IBP acceptance by using Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of technology. Another aspect which the study focuses on is the perception of teachers' towards the technology integration.

Internet Based Platforms and Communication Skills Enhancement

Internet Based Platforms (IBPs) are the new media technologies with certain specific characteristics of their own which facilitate constructive learning (De Vries, 2001). The users also act as knowledge creators. These platforms allow the users to create and share their content. Various studies have proved that these web-based collaborative technologies have promoted effective communication skills among learners (Averianova, 2014). Today, the users are not only content consumers but also content creators. A student who is extremely shy in the class room can be a user with highest number of posts on facebook, likewise an outgoing personality can

become passive on these platforms. These technologies can be used as an effective tool to enhance the communication competence of learners especially, of those who are introvert or feel hesitant in front of audience (Fusilier, M., & Durlabhji, S. 2005); Chang, C. W., Pearman, C., & Farha, N. (2012).

A wiki is a web-based tool that allows users to create and publish their content collaboratively Users can create content without giving information about their identities. Any content can be updated, created and edited on this platform and it allows multiple users to post and edit information. This feature allows for lot of written tasks, assignments, and projects on this platform. They can complete their tasks and assignments in collaboration with their peers and the learners can help each other with their mistakes. While working in collaboration, not only their targeted goals, but also their accessory goals can be achieved.

Blogs are similar to wikis. Users can share their ideas and views on this platform but unlike wiki the entries are authored by the owner with the information of date and time and visible to the users. Users can upload text, images, audio and video files and so on. The posts are displayed in a chronological sequence on this platform. The recent posts would appear on the top. Blogs have also been referred to as personal journals. Educators recommend the integration of blogs into language learning as they provide opportunities for writing for real audience, and they enable two-way communication between authors and readers. Research has suggested that Blogs can be used in education as instructional resources and are known as 'edublogs' (Hsu, Wang, Comac, 2008).

YouTube is the most popular destination of web tools for uploading and publishing of videos. A user can upload videos and allow them to be viewed privately or publicly. YouTube, with audio-visual perception features provide for suitable opportunities for students to enhance their

communication skills. The comments and discussions, which generally follow a video post, help to develop language and communication skills, particularly spoken and non-verbal through scaffolding process.

On Social Networking Sites (SNSs) the users can create their own profiles and then they can join other networks on the basis of different criterion like common interests, their geographical locations etc. Joosten (2012) opines that the openness of some social media facilitates the building of networks because it provides greater access to colleagues. "Educators can easily find and make connections with colleagues who are located all over the world and can have greater access to influential colleagues in their field. Since social media is an open platform, users can search and locate individuals, the profiles and shared information can be accessed, Joosten, (2012). Social Networking Platforms can be used as a very effective tool for the enhancement of communication skills by the hesitant students as well. Learning Management Systems (LMS) refer to a software application which is used for multiple educational purposes like managing the information sharing between student and teacher community, between teacher community and administration apart from learning content management. There are numerous software which are used by educational institutions for tracking, managing, reporting, sharing, record-keeping etc. Software such as MOODLE and MOOCs are very popular these days in educational institutions (McGill and Klobas, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is an amalgamation of eight previous theoretical models. Venkatesh et al. (2003) took 32 constructs from the previous theories to identify the most important factors influencing the intention to use a technology

which finally leads to the actual usage. Apart from these 32 constructs, four moderating variables namely – experience, voluntariness, gender, and age were also included in the theory.

Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions were considered as the direct determinants which lead to the intention to use a technology. Self-Efficacy and Anxiety were considered as indirect determinants. Apart from these determinants four moderators are there namely, gender, age, experience, and Voluntariness of Use. All these constructs were finalized by taking different constructs form all 8 frameworks. After finalizing this new model which includes all the significant variables from the previous theories, empirical validation was carried out. Cross validation was also done to test the validity of the model. All the tests provided a positive and strong empirical support to the new theory. Various studies have been conducted using (UTAUT) in various domains to observe the acceptance behavior of individuals towards adopting a technology.

Scope and Objectives

This study attempts to comprehend the factors which motivate the students of communication skills courses in accepting IBPs to accomplish their academic goals, inside and outside classroom learning. An attempt has also been made to cognize the perception of communication courses teachers towards the technology intervention in the present education scenario. The objectives of the study are as follow:

- To gauge the usage intensity of students of communication skills courses.

- To find out the most influential factors which motivate students to accept IBPs.

- To find out the moderating effect of the *gender* and *years of experience* while accepting IBPs.

- To comprehend the teachers' perception towards technology intervention in education.

Methodology

The study adopted the con-current research design. According to concurrent triangulation only one data collection phase is used, during which quantitative and qualitative surveys are conducted separately yet concurrently. The sample includes the undergraduate engineering and Technology students of communication courses and teachers from public and private universities. During the field study the data were collected using the questionnaire survey for the students of communication skills courses and the interview for the teachers of the same discipline. Simple random sampling was used to choose the student population for the survey. Students for focus group discussion were selected by consulting the concerned teacher. 4 to 5 students were chosen as representatives from the class for the discussion. Due to the limited number of faculty in the discipline of communication skills courses, all the teachers were selected for the structured interview. First questionnaire was designed to measure the intensity of use of IBPs by the respondents. The second questionnaire was designed to observe and analyze their acceptance behavior, and it was based on the UTAUT theoretical framework. The constructs and items of the theoretical model were modified as per the requirements of this study. The third tool which was a set of questions for interview was designed for teachers.

To investigate the internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha value was calculated. The alpha value obtained for public and private university students population is .802 and .837 respectively. Both the values were in an acceptable range. SPSS 16.0 was used to compile the data. Data entry was done with using proper coding techniques. To observe the difference between two groups,

independent one-sample t-test was used. Techniques such as Karl-Pearson's product-moment correlation and Standard Multiple Regression are used to measure the relationship and the strength of relationship between the variables.

Results and Discussions

The study consisted of quantitative and qualitative responses. Appropriate statistical techniques were used for the analysis, as mentioned in the methodology section. The first objective was- to observe the IBP usage intensity of undergraduate Engineering and Technology students of Communication skills courses. In order to achieve this goal data collection was done through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of queries related to the most preferred used Internet Based Platforms by the respondents. They were expected to mark their choices about the tasks for which they prefer to use the chosen IBP platforms. It was observed that YouTube, Learning Management Systems, and e-mails (LMS) are the most preferred choice of these students. They use these platforms to exchange, collaborate, upload, download and undertake tasks related to their academic tasks in the context of English language and communication courses. Most of the students spend 1 to 2 hours daily on IBPs in order to accomplish their academics. These students of private universities generally prefer to access and use IBPs inside the library, the central accessing laboratory, or their personal spaces, whereas the students of public universities prefer to access the IBPs from their personal computers.

The second objective was to find out the factors responsible for the acceptance of IBP by the students. In order to fulfill the second objective, UTAUT model by Venkatesh et.al has been used as a theoretical framework and a questionnaire was developed based on the UTAUT model. Standard multiple regression was used in order to find out the degree of variance between the motivating and affecting factors with usage. Performance Expectancy, Self Efficacy, Lack of

Anxiety and Intention to Use were found to be the 4 most significant determiners which motivate the students to use the Internet Based Platforms in order to accomplish their academic tasks for Communication skills courses.

The third objective was to observe whether a change in demographic variables, changes the acceptance behavior of the users. In order to observe the difference of opinions between the public and private group users, the male and female users, and the users with less and more years of experience, independent sample t-test was applied. By observing the results for these varied groups, difference was noted in some variables only. There is a significant difference in technology acceptance behavior between the males and females of the public group for two variables namely, Facilitating Conditions, and Anxiety. While in the private settings there is no difference of opinion between the male and female users. There is a difference of opinion between the users with more years of experience and users with fewer years of experience in public settings for three variables, namely PE, EE, and SE, whereas the users with different years of experience in a private setting differ in their opinion in two constructs, namely, PE and EE.

The fourth objective of the study was to perceive the opinions of the Communication skills courses teachers towards IBPs and allied technologies. In order to get their perception towards the new technological changes, their inclusion in the teaching learning process and their recommendations for better implementation, interview method was used. While answering the questions, the respondent teachers reported that IBPs are very helpful in saving their time and enhancing their performance. It helps to enhance the active engagement of the students, and gives a multisensory perception. It breaks the barrier of space and time. Storage problem which was a big issue has been solved to some extent because of IBPs. It not only enhances their academic skills but also hone their communicative competence. IBPs work as effective platforms

and provide a complete package of online communication skills which is required today. One recommendation which was suggested by almost all the respondent teachers was- the provision of teachers training so that they can prepare themselves completely and maximum utilization of the technology can be done.