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Using Global Marvels Platform by Children for Learning English as a Foreign Language: Saudi Parents' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Saudi parents' perceptions of Global Marvels as a platform to improve their kids' English as a Foreign Learning in light of the Technology Acceptance Model framework. The significance of the present study lies in that it endeavors to shed light upon how perceptions towards using an online platform correlate to using it for learning and teaching from parents' perspectives by answering the research question: What are the Saudi parents' perceptions of technology when using Global Marvel as an online EFL context for their kids? Two hundred and two Saudi parents responded to a survey that was used to collect data. The main findings showed significant positive correlations between the constructs of this Model. Results also revealed that the level of learners' experience in using the platform had a significant correlation with all variables of the Model. Using a specific technology also demonstrated significant correlations with users' skills in dealing with such a technology, attitude, perceived usefulness and ease of use. Saudi parents have perceived that Global Marvels can be beneficial in improving their kids' language skills. Nevertheless, the program should take into consideration the possible challenges, and plan well to introduce a successful online EFL experience to kids. Some pedagogical implications are presented for a better experience of using online platforms.

Keywords: children online learning, English as a Foreign Language, Global Marvels, online language learning, Saudi parents perceptions, Technology Acceptance Model

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Introduction

Covid-19 has had direct effects on educational systems all over the world. Consequently, many school systems have utilized distance learning platforms. Some previous research has focused on this transformation in relation to language learning and teaching (Alshumaimeri & Alhumud 2021; Manegre & Sabiri, 2020). In 2020, there was an emergency shift to distance learning in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Ministry of Education has encouraged online learning. In the Saudi context, research on online English as a foreign language (EFL) showed some positive effects (Aldaghri & Oraif, 2022; Layali & Al-Shlowiy, 2021; Oraif & Elyas, 2021) while others reported challenges encountered by the majority of learners and teachers (Al-jarf, 2024).

The studies on the effectiveness of different distance learning platforms, in the Saudi context, underscored the importance of such educational environments for EFL learning: Class Dojo, Blackboard, and Madrasati (Alkinani & Alzarhani 2021), and Zoom (Alfadda & Mahdi 2021). It is worth to mention that online platforms have become a strategic alternative for traditional education. As a result, Saudi Arabia established the National E- Learning Center to regulate this new trend.

Global Marvels online platform (GM) was launched in 2020, and it attracted parents who were in the pursuit of a convenient online environment for their kids. GM uses technology to teach EFL for 3 to 6-year-old kids through entertainment. The primary goal of GM is to improve learners' English skills and develop their communication abilities. To the best of our knowledge, GM has never been explored in previous research. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to examine Saudi parents' perceptions of GM as a platform to improve their kids' EFL learning in light of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework.

Since E-learning is becoming a strategic alternative nationally and internationally, the significance of the present study lies in that it provides stakeholders with an understanding of users' attitudes towards GM, and predicts their intentions to use it for learning and teaching.

In light of what we have mentioned above, the present study has sought to answer the following research question: What are the Saudi parents' perceptions of technology when using Global Marvel as an online EFL context for their kids?

This question has been investigated in terms of six particular hypotheses that are related to TAM theory as follows in the Research hypotheses:

The First Hypothesis: Overall technology acceptance will significantly and positively be affected by the Computer Self-Efficacy.

The Second Hypothesis: Saudi parents' perceptions towards the use of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived usefulness.

The third Hypothesis: Saudi parents' perceived usefulness of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived ease of use.

The fourth Hypothesis: Saudi parents' perceptions toward the use of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived ease of use.

The fifth Hypothesis: Saudi parents' perceptions of using Global Marvel in EFL will significantly and positively be affected by the experience of their children.

Literature Review

This section critically reviews relevant previous studies.

Parents' Perspectives on the EFL Learning Environment

Since English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was introduced early in the Saudi elementary curriculum, AlShuaifan (2022) investigated parents' perspectives towards their kids' EFL education and found that respondents' attitudes towards their children's EFL learning were generally positive. Similarly, Daqiq (2021) found that parents held positive attitudes toward their children's learning of EFL. In their study of Saudi EFL high school students' engagement in online classes, Oraif and Elyas (2021) claimed that "using an online environment with other technological tools like videos and links could support learners' engagement"(p.12). They found that the level of engagement of their participants was high. Oraif and Elyas (2021) argued that this favorable engagement would aid learners in enhancing their EFL experiences.

Moreover, Aboulfetouh (2011) maintained that parents' positive attitudes towards their children's study of English could mainly be driven by socioeconomic factors. In a previous study, Al-Qahtani and Al-Zumor (2016) investigated Saudi parents' perspectives on utilizing English as a medium of Instruction (EMI) in international schools. They revealed that parents' showed positive perceptions towards learning English early "because they realize the importance of English as an international language, which can provide better opportunities for their children in the future" (p. 31). Nevertheless, Al-Qahtani and Al-Zumor reported parents' concerns that learning English had negatively affected their children's mother tongue.

Punar and Karatepe (2019) explored different parents' views on how learning EFL would help their children learn about other cultures. Their study found that some parents felt that culture was a vital approach to learning a foreign language, while others did not believe that culture was necessary for acquiring a language. Bago's (2018) study employed a quantitative method to examine Croatian parents' attitudes toward the learning of Foreign Languages (FL) at an early age. The participants included 110 parents of children who were enrolled in the primary schools. It was found out that parents' perceptions of learning a foreign language, at early stages, were positively significant.

Attitudes towards EFL Learning in Virtual Classroom Environment

In their study on Chinese parents' attitudes and beliefs about their early children learning for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dong, Cao, and Li (2020) found out that the majority of parents showed positive experiences with online learning, believing that the childhood period was an important time for English acquisition and development. Despite that, some parents were not in favor of virtual learning due to a shortage of time, and the need for training. Lau and Lee (2021) stated that parents suggested that schools should support distance learning since "most children were not able to complete the learning tasks independently"(p. 863). In online learning, technical difficulties represent concern that may negatively affect the experience of students. Yet, despite the fact that virtual environments may not be suitable for all learning styles, technological developments might mitigate these obstacles (Manegre and Sabiri, 2020). For digital platforms to be effective, students and educators must have a reliable Internet connection and understand the online class instructions (Manegre & Sabiri, 2020). Similarly, in the Saudi context, Alkinani and Alzarhani (2021) studied the efficacy, usefulness, and implementation of the Madrasati platform as a learning management system platform. Results revealed that students would be less afraid to use technology because the educational platform had the latest technology and excellent teachers.

Moreover, users of the Madrasati platform had positive attitudes as they viewed it as a gateway to new job opportunities in distance learning in Saudi Arabia. In a study that explored the acceptance of distance education by Saudi students, instructors, and parents, Alkinani (2021) found out that they were comfortable with distance learning in public schools. Yet, instructors reported difficulties in preparing online lessons due to lack of experience, a shortage of time to help their young kids in online courses, and poor self-regulation in their children.

In her study to explore Saudi college students' attitudes toward distance learning (DL), Aljarf (2024, p. 18) indicated that learners showed "more acceptance, no grumbling about and criticisms of the use of DL" partially because users "seem to be more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both DL and F2F and the conditions for making them more effective." University EFL Saudi teachers' perceptions toward virtual classes, on the other hand, were investigated by Algethami (2022) who found that

> Although many of the teachers agreed to the proposition that in their contexts, online teaching can provide a better learning environment for language teaching than F2F teaching, the majority of them believed that online teaching is less effective than F2F teaching. (p. 325)

Furthermore, he mentioned that most EFL teachers reported that virtual classes had negatively impacted their students' attitude toward learning. In a similar vein, Algraini (2023) surveyed a group of 32 EFL teachers at Saudi universities for their perceptions of virtual learning during Coronavirus. The results of her study demonstrated that while the teachers saw online education as an effective solution during the COVID-19 crisis, the findings highlighted the need to address the technological and social challenges that arose. Alhaider (2023) conducted a study to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers and students at a Saudi educationl institution. The primary focus of the study was to understand the development of the four core English language skills pre- and post-coronavirus pandemic. She concluded that "e-learning was beneficial for improving students' LSWR at various language proficiency levels" (p. 17), recommending that "English instructors be more aware of students' psychological needs during the language acquisition process" in online learning and teaching.

Danesh, Bailey and Whisenand (2015) stressed that virtual courses may enhance communication abilities since they promote the growth of English proficiency. In addition, Berry (2019) observed that using audio or video calls in the e-learning environment gave students a chance for ongoing connection. As a result, this connection improved their involvement and feeling of community. Synchronous classes and the ability to chat in real-time proved to have good effects on learning (Pan & Sullivan 2005). This finding was also corroborated by Alshumaimeri and Alhumud (2021) whose students believed that virtual classes enhanced their communication and speech abilities. Al-Qahtani (2019) also showed that most students and instructors favored EFL virtual classrooms, underscoring their role in improving students' communication skills. When Saudi universities applied Learning Management Systems (LMSs), Hussein (2016) investigated the students' attitudes towards Blackboard. She showed how students had positive attitudes towards using Blackboard, mainly due to its role in enhancing their English language abilities and communicating with their instructors.

Gür and Türel (2022) conducted a study to explore how the roles, attitudes, and behaviors of Turkish parents impacted their kids' usage of technology in virtual learning. Results showed that parents' views about their children's use of Information Computer Technology (ICT) were positive due to academic reasons in particular. In contrast, some parents were worried that their

kids would face some risks in virtual classrooms. Hence, they took some precautions to protect their kids by understanding, monitoring, and restricting their online access.

Jin (2015) studied how Facebook as a computer-mediated communication (CMC) platform impacted a classroom that was taking place between the United States and South Korea to improve communication in the target language and develop intercultural competence. Findings demonstrated that Facebook facilitated intercultural communication between Korean EFL learners and individuals from the target culture.

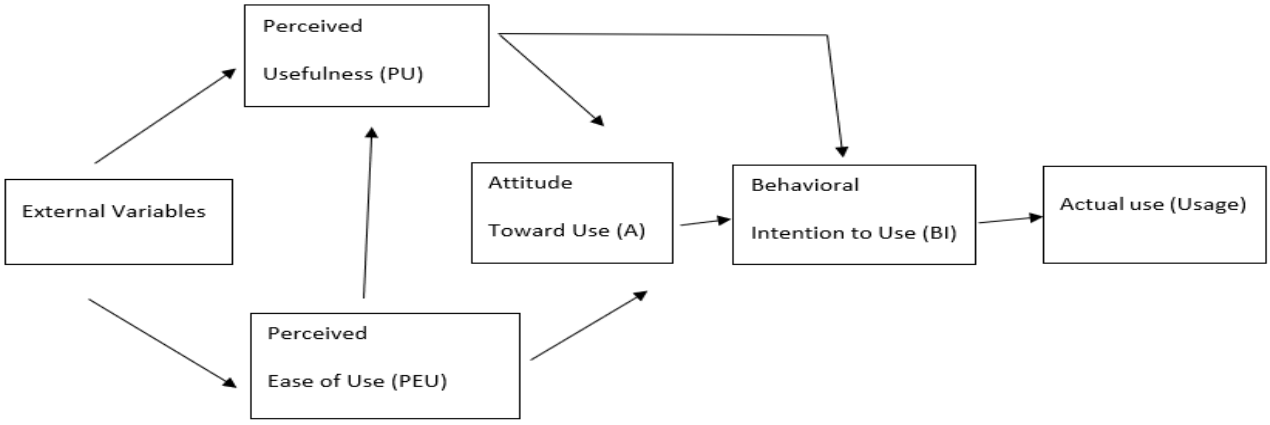
Technology Acceptance Model

Table One and Figure One demonstrates TAM. Davis (1989) introduced TAM as a theoretical framework that could explain individuals' acceptance of technology. "Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitude toward use" (p. 320) are constructs of TAM. However, perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) have a strong relationship because they are fundamental factors of individual acceptance. PU is the belief that utilizing a particular system is beneficial to performance (Davis, 1989). Thus, an individual's attitude toward computer use is influenced by how they perceive the educational benefits of new technology. In contrast, PEU is the belief that a specific system is user-friendly (Davis, 1989). Figure one shows TAM construcs graphically.

Table1. *A Brief Description of TAM* Constructs

Variable	Definition
Computer self-efficacy (External variable)	The belief in an individual's ability to utilize the computer when needed to accomplish an assignment successfully. (Holden & Ruda ,2011).
Perceived ease of use	The belief in an individual's ability to do a task without any assistance. (Scherer et al., 2019).
Perceived usefulness	The belief that new technology will improve academic and career performance (Scherer et al., 2019).
Attitude towards technology	A personal assessment is related to the usage of the means of the technology. (Lee & Lehto, 2013).
Behavioral intention	A user's intention to utilize any device of technology.
Actual use	A user's purpose usage of modern technology. (Scherer et al.,2019).

Note 1. Adapted from Alfadda and Mahdi (2021, p. 887)



F*igure 1.* Key Constructs of TAM and their relationships (Adopted from Turner et al., 2010, p. 470)

Songkram, Chootongchai, Osuwan, Chuppunnarat, and Songkram (2023) conducted a study to determine whether implementing the Behavioral Intention (BI) model for virtual learning platforms would influence Thai education. The main findings indicated that students' comprehension was facilitated by attitude, Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). Furthermore, they showed that Technology Self-efficacy (TSE), Subjective Norms (SN), and Facilitating Conditions (FC) provided a clear understanding of the virtual learning platform's acceptance. PU showed a negative impact on BI. So, Songkram et al. (2023) suggested that it would benefit teachers and researchers to use the adoption model, as it seemed that there is an effective relationship between virtual learning platforms and academic achievement.

Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) studied the correlation between the different variables of TAM when EFL learners used the Zoom program for learning. Seventy-five English undergraduates participated. The findings of the study showed strong correlations between variables such as Actual use of Zoom, attitudes of learners and their behavioural intentions. Moreover, the study revealed a significant correlation between computer self-efficacy (CSE) and the constructs PU, PEU, attitude, and BI when learners used Zoom. TAM variables and experience were positively correlated. Similarly, Ariff, Zakuan, Jusoh, and Bahari (2012, p. 448) underscored "the critical role of CSE in predicting individual responses to information technology systems."

Abdullah, Ward, and Ahmed (2016) stated that the E-portfolio system impacted students' performance in UK universities. In their study, Abdullah et al. (2016) examined the General Extended Technology Acceptance Model for E-Learning (GETAMEL). They discovered that the constructs of Subjective Norm, Self-Efficacy, Computer Anxiety, Enjoyment, and Experience impacted learners' PEU, PU of e-portfolio and BI. Their findings suggested that the learners' PEU of the e-portfolio could be predicted based on Experience, Enjoyment, Computer Self-Efficacy and Subjective Norm respectively. Moreover, they found that the e-portfolio enhanced the academic achievement of university students.

Šumak et al. (2011) conducted a study to investigate learners' acceptance of Moodle E-learning system. The primary findings of their study indicated that the actual use of Moodle was significantly related to two fundamental factors: behavioral intentions and attitudes toward the use

of Moodle. Šumak et al. (2011) concluded that learners would mainly opt for a specific technology based on its usefulness for their learning.

Methodology

The present study has investigated Saudi-parents' perceptions of technology when using GM as an EFL online platform. The theoretical framework of the current study (TAM) has been adopted to identify correlations between its constructs and between experience of use and the different constructs.

Participants

Saudi parents, whose kids were registered in GM to study EFL in the academic year 2022, participated in the study. The mother tongue of the parents is Arabic, and their ages ranged between 23 and 55 years old. Simple random sampling was utilized to select the sample. Two hundred and two respondents participated in this research.

The current study used 202 participants of Saudi parents. As for the level of experience in using GM, Nearly twenty-six percent of the respondents reported that their kids had an excellent experience in utilising this platform, whereas about twenty-two percent of participants reported a very good experience in utilising the GM platform. In addition, thirty-eight percent of the participants showed that their kids had a good experience in using GM. Nine percent and five percent of the participants revealed that their children had fair and poor experiences respectively in using GM as shown in Table Two.

Table 2. *Demographic information on the experience of children*

	N	Percent
Participants	202	100%
Experience		
Poor	11	5.4%
Fair	18	8.9%
Good	76	37.6
Very good	44	21.8%
Excellent	53	26.2%

Research Instruments

In the present study, we adapted a questionnaire from Alfadda and Mahdi (2021). The survey involved two primary parts related to personal information and 26 items to the six constructs in the framework. The participants were requested to rank their agreement level to all items by rating their answers on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The constructs of TAM are represented in the instrument as follows: three items for Computer Self-Efficacy, seven items for Perceived Usefulness, three items for Actual Use, four items for Perceived Ease of Use, four items for Attitude, and five items for Behavioral Intention.

Few changes have been made to the items to match the objective of the study. These changes included substituting Zoom with the GM in all items of the questionnaire. Furthermore, Computer Self-Efficacy was changed into the Computer Self-Efficacy of a child in using the GM platform. Additionally, Behavioral Intention of English through using Zoom was substituted with Behavioral Intention of using GM for learning the English language. In addition, in the items of the survey, the word 'a student' was changed into 'a child', and all the personal pronouns 'I' and the possessive pronouns (my, me) in the previous survey were changed into 'my child or kid' in

the most of items of the survey except item 9 changed into GM gives my child more control over his- her learning. However, for item 13, the phrase 'discussion forum' was changed into 'literacy planet platform'.

It is worth mentioning that the questionnaire was translated into Arabic. The questionnaire was initially piloted on 10 participants to assess its reliability. The reliability of the tool was 0.969 in the Cronbach Alpha, which is rated as an excellent reliability factor.

Data was collected and analyzed by using SPSS. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (non-parametric test) was used as shown in the following section.

Results

The statistical analysis of the data showing correlations between different constructs is displayed in Figure Two below. This is followed by a description of the results in relation to the hypotheses of the study.

		Computer Self-Efficacy	PU	Actual Use	PEU	Attitude	Behavioral Intention
Computer Self-Efficacy	Spearman's Correlation	1.000**	618**	552**	.610**	520**	.537**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
PU	Spearman's Correlation	.618**	1.000**	.681**	.739**	.843**	.850**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
Actual Use	Spearman's Correlation	.552**	.681**	1.000**	.644**	.607**	.648**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
PEU	Spearman's Correlation	.610**	.739**	.644**	.000**	.759**	.728**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
Attitude	Spearman's Correlation	.520**	.843**	.607**	.759**	1.000**	.892**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000

Figure 2. Spearman's Rho correlation*
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The First Hypothesis: Overall technology acceptance will significantly and positively be affected by the Computer Self-Efficacy.

According to the results represented in Figure 2, the first hypothesis is supported since there is a significant positive correlation between CSE and each of the constructs as follows: PU of Global Marvel (.61), actual use of GM (.55), PEU (.61), Attitudes (.52), and Behavioral Intention (.53) respectively.

The Second Hypothesis: Saudi parents' attitude towards the use of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived usefulness.

According to the results displayed in Figure 2, it is noteworthy that there is a significant positive correlation between PU and Attitudes towards the use of GM (.84) and Perceived Usefulness and Behavioral Intention (.85). The second hypothesis is supported.

The Third Hypothesis: Saudi parents' perceived usefulness of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived ease of use.

As can be seen in Figure 2, there is a significant positive correlation between PEU and PU (.73). The hypothesis is supported.

The Fourth Hypothesis Saudi parents' perceptions towards the use of GM will significantly and positively be affected by perceived ease of use.

The results represented in Figure Two show that there is a significant positive correlation between ease of use and all the other constructs as follows CSE (.610**), PU (.739**), Actual Use (.644**), Attitude (.759**) and Behavioral Intention (.728**) respectively. Similarly, attitude towards use and behavioral intention to use is significantly correlated to each construct of TAM, suggesting that parents' perceptions of ease of use are highly associated with the actual use of GM. This finding supports the hypothesis.

The Fifth Hypothesis:
Saudi parents' perceptions of using Global Marvel in EFL will significantly and positively be affected by the experience of their children.

The results in Table Three support this hypothesis as they reveal significant positive correlations between the kids' experience and TAM variables when using Global Marvel in English learning.

Table 3. *Correlations*

Correlations						
	Computer Self-Efficacy	PU	Actual Use	PEU	Attitude	Behavioral Intention

Experience in using GM	Correlation Coefficient	.252**	.274**	.172*	.359**	.306**	.319**
	Sig.(2 tailed)	.000	.000	.014	.000	.000	.000
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

Discussion

With regard to the First Hypothesis of the present study, Computer Self-Efficacy showed a significant and positive effect on overall technology acceptance as can be seen in Figure 2. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Ariff, 2012; Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Reid & Levy, 2008). This finding suggests that learners' computer self-efficacy can be associated with users' acceptance of a specific technology.

Results also showed that parents' attitude toward using GM was significantly and positively affected by their perceived usefulness of this technology. This finding supports previous studies (Alfadda & Mahdi 2021; Sumak et al., 2011) which indicated that users' favorable perception of a technological device increased their attitude toward utilising it. Moreover, in line with previous studies (Alfadda &Mahdi 2021; Davis et al., 1989; Abdullah et al, 2016), our findings show that parents' perceived usefulness of GM has been significantly and positively affected by parents' perceived ease of use. Although user-friendly technologies are required for all contexts, it is particularly important for the context of the present study since the end users of GM are kids with limited skills in using the online platforms. These perceptions of perceived usefulness and ease of use can be attributed to the syllabus that has taken into consideration the age and the online context. Similarly, attitude toward use and behavioral intention to use are significantly correlated to each construct of TAM, suggesting that parents' perceptions of ease of use are highly associated with the actual use of GM. This finding is in line with previous studies (Weng & Tsai, 2015; Abdullah et al., 2016; Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Songkram et al., 2023). Alhaider (2023) underscored the importance of e-learning for improving EFL learners' language skills. Nevertheless, she recommended that "English instructors be more aware of students' psychological needs during the language acquisition process" in online learning and teaching. Ease of use of GM, as shown in the present study, seems to suggest that learners' psychological needs were fostered, and this, in turn, leads to a significant positive correlation between perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

In support of previous studies (Abdullah et al., 2016; Afadda and Mahdi, 2021; Castaneda et al. 2007; Hsu and Lu 2004; Songkram et al., 2023), results demonstrated that experience was a significant predictor of TAM variables as shown in Table 3. Experience significantly correlated with PU, PEU, attitude, and behavioral intention. Actual use also showed a significant correlation to experience, suggesting that better experience would allow for further perceptions of perceived usefulness and hence the actual use. Afadda and Mahdi (2021, p. 894) maintained that "Experience has proved to be a significant predictor of perceived usefulness, which suggests that increasing experience may lead to more perceptions of usefulness." Lau and Lee (2021) recommended that schools provide support for kids to be able to complete their tasks successfully. Moreover, Algraini (2023) and Alhaider (2023) emphasized that for online experience to be effective, technical, social, and psychological challenges need to be addressed.

Conclusion

The present study has aimed to investigate Saudi parents' perceptions of using GM as an online platform to improve Saudi kids' learning of EFL. The theoretical model we used was TAM. TAM helped to identify correlations between its constructs and between experience of use and the different constructs. Results showed significant positive correlations between the constructs of TAM when using GM. Moreover, experience demonstrated a positive correlation with all variables of TAM.

The findings of the present study indicated that using a specific technology may be dependent upon users' skills in dealing with such technology. Thus, schools are recommended to assess users' computer self-efficacy. Program administrations can also provide support and clear instructions to users based on their level. They should also attend to all types of challenges, and be prepared to address them properly.

It can be concluded that Saudi parents have perceived that GM can be beneficial in improving their kid's language skills. Nevertheless, the program should take into consideration the possible challenges and plan well to introduce a successful online EFL experience to kids.

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