

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE USE OF VIDEO PODCAST LESSONS AND MOODLE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was four-fold: (1) investigate the effectiveness of using video podcast lessons in a Moodle class to enhance students' English grammatical and writing competence, (2) investigate the extent to which using video podcast lessons in the Moodle class improves English grammatical and writing competence, (3) investigate whether the students' grammatical competence influences their writing competence, and (4) examine students' attitudes towards their writing classes, and their improvement in English grammatical and writing competence. A sample group of 73 university students at Thaksin University participated in this study. Simple random sampling was used to select the sample group. The t-test was used to analyse the data. Data was also derived from the pre-test, the post-test, the questionnaire, student journals and a student focus group. The results revealed that learning achievement in English writing among participants using video podcast lesson in Moodle class was higher than that of students taught through the conventional face-to-face instruction, at a significance level of 0.05. The students in the experimental group also had more positive attitudes in three aspects (writing class, grammar and writing skills) compared to those in the traditional face-to-face class. Learning grammar for writing using video podcast lessons and grammar and writing discussions via Moodle class appeared to lead to improvements in English grammar and writing.

Keywords: Video Podcast, Moodle class, Language Learning and Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Technology is becoming increasingly important in the classroom. Social media has become commonplace, and the way we use technology has completely changed the way we live. Moodle is a free open-source software platform that is easy to use and very flexible (Al-Ajlan & Zedan, 2008). It allows teachers to organise, manage and deliver course materials by integrating chats and forums, assignments, quizzes, lecture notes, any kind of document, and multimedia resources, such as graphics, video or audio, into the platform. The use of multimedia tools to create attractive activities enhances students' learning and increases their interest and motivation in their studies (Goodwin-Jones, 2003).

As is the case with Moodle, the influence of podcasts on education has been increasing. This learning tool has been shown to provide flexibility and help learners control their learning at their own pace and time while watching or listening, which creates freedom of learning. Besides, podcasts strengthen comprehension of subject matter and help students to review material. Beheler (2007) further explained that instructors might use podcasts as

an effective teaching instrument by uploading podcast lectures to classroom websites and inviting their students to access the websites. Students can enhance their learning by listening to the podcasts online or downloading the podcasts for later use outside the classroom. Podcast lectures could also be used to help learners to review course materials at their convenience, which may be helpful for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Since podcasting is an innovative mobile technology, there are only a few prior studies about the best practices in using podcasts effectively within the foreign language teaching context. To the researcher's best knowledge, no previous research has focused on the effects of podcast instruction in ESL writing courses in the Thai context, indicating a research issue and knowledge gap in the field of EFL teaching.

Studies strongly suggest that the most useful method to help students improve their command of grammar in writing is to use students' writing as the basis for discussing grammar use. Researchers also agree that it is more effective to teach grammar in the context of writing than to approach the topic by teaching isolated skills (Calkins, 1980; DiStefano & Killion, 1984; Leki, 1992). Second language (L2) writers come from a grammar-dependent L2 learning environment. This may have encouraged Leki (1992) to recommend that L2 learners should be taught grammar, for they are already used to learning English through grammar.

Thus, the research questions for the present study are as follows:

- (1) How did the experimental group and the control group differ in English grammar and writing test scores at the post-test?
- (2) To what extent did using video podcast lessons in the Moodle class as a tool for learning English grammar in the context of writing and problem discussions improve the grammatical and writing competence of the students in the experimental group?
- (3) Did the grammatical competence of students in the experimental group influence the improvement of their writing competence?
- (4) How did the groups of students differ in terms of their attitudes towards their writing classes, and their improvement in English grammatical and writing competence?

To address these questions, this study focused on examining the benefits of a video podcast and Moodle and the importance of grammar in writing. The video podcast was used to teach grammar in the context of writing whereas Moodle was employed as a tool for discussing grammatical and writing problems. The research hypotheses of this study are detailed below:

- (1) The learning achievement in relation to English grammatical and writing of students in the experimental group is higher than those in the control group at the 0.05 level of significance;
- (2) English grammar and writing test post-test scores of the students in the experimental group are higher than those of the control group;
- (3) The students' grammatical competence influences the improvement of their writing competence in the experimental group; and
- (4) The students in the experimental group have more positive attitudes towards learning English grammar and writing than those in the control group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social constructivism

The social constructivist emphasis on the socialisation of the child in the social environment is reflected in one of the concepts in Vygotsky's theory (1978), which is called zone of

proximal development. The zone of proximal development is an area of learning that occurs when a person is assisted by teachers or more experienced helpers. The person learning the skill cannot acquire it without the assistance of the teacher or peer. According to this theory, lecturers support learners' learning by implementing the concepts of scaffolding, tutoring, and cooperative learning and learning communities (Brown, 1994). This theory, therefore, emphasises the support of lecturers in enabling learners to accomplish more complicated skills.

In this study, a zone of proximal development (ZPD) is constructed via Moodle and video podcast, with the help of others on Moodle platform, such as teachers and more proficient peers, who help by explaining English grammar usage and making comments about their written assignments. That is to say, the discussion via Moodle can enable students to increase their knowledge from their actual stage of development to their potential stage of development, a stage in which their grammatical and writing competence is promoted. Thus, students can utilise video podcast lessons to learn grammar alongside using Moodle to facilitate grammar and writing discussions. This can consequently lead to developments in their grammar and writing skills as these tools can help to lower affective filter of learners.

Krashen (1981) states that motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety are key factors in second language learning. A high level of motivation and a low level of anxiety reduce the Affective Filter, which later enhances the amount of comprehensible input and consequently promotes language learning. However, in the eLearning environment, learners study in a non-threatening environment (Liu & Sadler, 2003).

Moodle and Podcasting

Moodle can be used as to scaffold the development and construction of meaning through the sharing of ideas, texts and other sources (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003). This approach reflects the process of knowledge construction in academia, in which students are part of a community of practice, and knowledge is socially created and constantly evolving (Angelo, 2000). In other words, students have opportunities to interact socially and negotiate meaning as they have enough time and feedback. When interacting, students work in an atmosphere with less stress and lower level of anxiety, so learner autonomy is enhanced (Egbert & HansonSmith, 1999).

Podcasting can be considered a potentially effective technology for teaching writing skills due to its characteristics. Ashton-Hay and Brookes (2007) suggested that podcasting could help to solve problems concerning self-paced learning and provide less proficient learners a supportive tool for their language gaps. In their study, podcasting provided opportunities for learners to learn and review writing and grammatical lessons, and for instructors to provide language learners with samples of real language and authentic materials (Ashton-Hay & Brooks, 2007). Shahramiri and Gorjian (2013) examined the influence of podcast transcription on the writing accuracy of intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners. Fifty participants took part in their study (Shahramiri & Gorjian, 2013). The learners received grammar lessons to promote writing accuracy, supplemented by podcast transcription materials. The findings revealed that advanced learners had higher writing post-test scores compared to the intermediate group (Shahramiri & Gorjian, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

Thus, the conceptual framework of this study is based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and proposes that learning grammar for the writing context using video podcast lessons and grammar and writing discussions via Moodle class can reduce the level of the affective filter and raise the comprehensible input. A zone of proximal development (ZPD) was constructed on Moodle. In this zone, language support provided by more

knowledgeable people is provided by teachers and peers, who can explain English grammar and provide suggestions about writing. This promotes learners' progression from their actual stage of development to their potential stage of development, which means the improvement of their grammatical and writing competence.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This was a sequential mixed method research study in which sampling was used on intact classes as the experimental and control groups. A Basic Writing class was randomly selected to be the experimental group, who were taught via video podcast lessons in the Moodle class. The other class was the control group, who were taught by conventional face-to-face instruction. All students in both experimental and control groups were required to take pre and post-tests.

The experimental process lasted sixteen weeks. The volunteer participants in the experimental group were given journal forms and asked to keep a weekly journal of their activities as they accessed their Moodle class to study grammatical aspects and basic writing. A post-questionnaire regarding students' attitudes towards writing classes was administered to both groups at the end of the study. The questionnaire regarding students' attitudes towards using video podcast lessons in the Moodle class was administered in the experimental group only at the end of the study. In addition, a student focus group discussion was conducted at the end of the study. Quantitative data consisted of test scores and responses from the questionnaires. Qualitative data was collected from students' focus group discussion and student journals.

Video Podcast and Moodle

The video podcast lessons and Moodle site were used in this study. Students were given access to the site from January to May 2017. The video podcast lessons posted on Moodle site provided supporting information that related to grammar and basic writing. Students worked on six assignments in Moodle. Moodle was used for writing information and to share resources with the lecturer and other classmates while the students were working collaboratively on the assignments. Thai language was used to discuss their English grammatical and writing problems such as rechecking grammatical accuracy, writing content or organisation. However, if some students preferred to communicate in English, they could do so, for example, when communicating with the lecturer or posting the first draft of their writing assignment.

Participants

This study was conducted at Thaksin University in Songkhla. The participating students were two classes of undergraduate students taking Basic Writing courses. There was a total of 73 students. Sixty-three students in this group were female and ten were male. Their ages were between 17 and 22 years. They were considered intermediate EFL students.

Grammatical and Writing Competency Test

The pre-test and post-test were designed in similar formats. The total score of each test was 80 marks and each test contained two main sections: grammar and writing. The grammar section comprised 40 items at 1 mark each, for a total of 40 marks. It tested the students' grammatical knowledge in terms of articles and determiners, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, passive and active voice, and simple and complex

grammatical structures. These were the key areas of grammar considered important for writing by four experienced lecturers who had taught the Basic Writing course. The writing section comprised five questions, which were used as a clue for writing a paragraph. The total score of this section was 40 marks. For each of the five questions, the students were instructed to write at least 140 words. The criteria for grading the students' writing were adapted from the Holistic approach (Jacobs et al., 1981). The weighting assigned to each rating scale of each aspect of writing was adapted as per the suggestion of language specialists in terms of content, organisation, language use and grammar, vocabulary and mechanics (see Table 1).

Table 1: Full Score of Each Aspect of Writing

Student No.	Content	Organisation	Language Use and Grammar	Vocabulary	Mechanics	Total score
	10 marks	12 marks	12 marks	2 marks	4 marks	40 marks

The procedure for constructing the pre and post grammar and writing competency tests was as follows:

- (1) A table of learning unit objectives was constructed to identify the numbers of items and how to measure the test content and the objectives.
- (2) The result of the analysis in step 1 was used to construct the 48 items of the objective test, comprising gap-filling, error recognition, and multiple-choice items, and 4 items of the subjective test.
- (3) Three English language specialists were consulted to check the content and validity of the test. Their feedback was used to improve the test before administering it to the students. The content of the test was evaluated through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). This resulted in an IOC value of 0.6-1.0, which was acceptable.
- (4) The revised test was tried out with 35 third-year students who had studied English paragraph writing to check the level of difficulty of test items and the discrimination index. These students were a different group from those in the sample group.
- (5) The 40 test items with a value of level of difficulty between 0.20 and 0.80 and the discrimination index higher than 0.20 were selected. The items were also selected based on the defined learning objectives of four units. The test was then tried out with students who were in a different group from those in step 4. The test scores were calculated to check for reliability using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR_{20}). The value of this reliability was 0.76.
- (6) The 40 test items from item 5 were then employed in the study.

Questionnaire

The procedure for constructing the questionnaire was as follows:

- (1) Literature on attitudes and questionnaire development was reviewed to develop the initial questionnaire, for which 20 items were formulated. These items sought to measure students' attitudes towards English learning, including (a) their attitudes towards the writing classes; (b) their perceptions of grammar improvement and (c) their attitudes towards writing skill improvement.
- (2) Three language specialists were consulted to check the congruence between the questionnaire items and the three objectives: students' attitudes towards using video podcast lessons in Moodle class, perception of grammar improvement and attitudes towards writing skill improvement. The value of IOC was 0.6-1.0. The questionnaire comprised statements to which the students were required to respond by selecting a response on a five-point Likert scale from "very low" to

- “very high”. The initial questionnaire was then tested with students who were not in the sample group. The results were used to improve the test by making it more comprehensive, reliable and valid for collecting data.
- (3) The questionnaire was then administered to the experimental group of students. The Cronbach’s Alpha value of this questionnaire was 0.72. It could be inferred that the questionnaire was acceptable to be employed in this study.

Student Journals

The total number of volunteer participants in journal writing was five. Each student in the study kept a weekly journal.

Student focus group

A student focus group was conducted after the study, and five volunteer students from the experimental group, comprising four females and one male from the initial sample of 36, participated in the studying and discussion. The student focus group was conducted to extract more information from the student participants in a casual and less constraining manner. The process took 47 minutes. The data were collected with a voice recorder on mobile phone. Thai was used in the discussion.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the testing of the different methods of learning were analysed and interpreted in two main ways, by quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data includes the data obtained from the pre and post-test. First, the t-test was used to compare the writing competency of the experimental and control groups. The scores from the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group were then analysed using the t-test to compare the students’ grammatical and writing competence before and after the experiment. Next, the item facilities of the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group were tested in order to ensure that they were not much different. Then, the data from the grammar and writing sections of the pre-test and post-test were analysed using Pearson correlation to find out whether the students’ grammatical competence influences their writing competence. The writing section of the tests were graded by two lecturers, to make sure that there was consistency among ratings with an inter-rater reliability of 0.88 in the pre-test and 0.90 in the post-test.

Descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected through the questionnaire and student journals. An independent t-test was also employed to answer the research objectives. A questionnaire regarding students’ attitudes towards learning was administered to the students at the end of the sixteenth week of study. The qualitative data also includes the data obtained from the students’ views recorded in their journals and their opinions voiced in the group discussion. This data was placed into the categories of negative, positive, or not sure to represent their overall experience with video podcast lesson in Moodle class.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

For the first research objective, the results showed that both the control and experimental groups had higher mean scores after learning English grammar and writing. Based on the results of the t-test, it can be concluded that the learning achievement of the experimental group is higher than the control group at a significance level of 0.00 (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of post-test scores (Control group and Experimental group)

Group	n	X	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control group	37	46.38	7.46	3.42	.000
Experimental group	36	52.42	8.20		

P < .05

Regarding the second research objective, Table 3 below showed the comparative result of the pre-test and post-test of students studied via video podcast lessons in Moodle. The result indicated that the score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test at a significance level of 0.00.

Table 3: Comparison of pre-test and post-test mean scores in the grammar and writing sections (Experimental group)

Comparison of mean scores	Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		t-test	
			M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Total test score	EXP	36	36.39	4.63	52.42	8.20	16.29	.000
Grammar section	EXP	36	20.06	3.16	29.67	4.82	13.62	.000
Writing section	EXP	36	16.33	2.47	22.47	4.82	8.62	.000

P < .05

In addition, as shown in Table 3, there were statistically significant differences in the experimental group's mean scores in the grammar section ($t = -13.62$, $p = .000$) and writing section ($t = -8.62$, $p = .000$). These findings showed that the students made significant improvement in grammar and writing after the experiment.

For the grammar section, the facility values indicated that there were more students who chose the correct answers in the post-test. All of the students selected the correct answer for items seven and twenty-four (verb and subject agreement) in the post-test. The average values of item facility rose from 0.54 in the pre-test to 0.83 in the post-test. When compared to the pilot test, the values of item facility were not very different, at 0.45 in the pre-test and 0.48 in the post-test. Based on the findings, it could be inferred that the increased values of item facility resulted from the improvement of the students' grammatical competence.

In terms of the students' writing competence, the result also indicated that the students composed better paragraphs in the post-test than they did in the pre-test. They employed English grammatical structures better and more appropriately. Table 4 showed the increases in average scores for each aspect of writing criteria.

Table 4: Breakdown of Experimental Group's pre-test and post-test writing scores (Total score in writing section = 40)

Writing Aspect	n	Full score	Pre-test		Post-test	
			M	SD	M	SD
Content	36	10	4.51	0.93	6.10	1.44
Organisation	36	12	4.72	0.97	5.25	1.36
Language use and grammar	36	12	5.61	1.22	8.36	1.69
Vocabulary	36	2	0.63	0.22	0.98	0.42
Mechanics	36	4	0.80	0.76	1.68	0.74

The findings of this study showed the development of English grammatical and writing competence of the intermediate EFL students. There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test. The values of item facility rose in the post-test and participants had higher scores in each aspect of writing in the post-test.

The improvement in learning achievement in this study was the outcome of the focus on teaching grammar in the context of writing via video podcast lessons along with discussing grammatical and writing problems in Moodle. Therefore, it could be inferred that grammatical competence influenced students' writing competence.

To further confirm the result of this assumption and to answer the third research objective, the correlations of the scores in grammar and writing sections were assessed. The result of correlations of the scores in grammar and writing sections of the tests revealed that the students' grammatical competence affected their writing competence. The results indicated that the correlations of both tests were significant as shown in the table 5 below.

Table 5: Correlations of the students' scores in grammar and writing sections of the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group (total score of grammar vs writing = 80)

Correlations of scores	Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		t-test	
			M	SD	M	SD	r	p
Grammar section	EXP	36	20.06	3.16	29.67	4.82	13.62	.000
Writing section	EXP	36	16.33	2.47	22.47	4.82	8.62	.000

Results of the Questionnaire

For the last research objective, the results showed that the score for the experimental group was higher than the control group in three aspects, in terms of their attitudes towards their writing classes, grammar and writing skills as described below.

A. Students' attitudes towards learning between the experimental and control groups

A total score from questions 1-6 was used to determine students' attitudes towards the writing class. There was a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards writing classes between the experimental and the control groups ($t = -4.446$, $df = 71$, $p < .01$). On average, the total score for the experimental group was 24.11 (SD = 3.00). The total score for the control group was 19.84 (SD = 4.94). Results are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Students' attitudes towards learning in both classes, grammar improvement and writing skill improvement (Control and Experimental groups)

Conditions	Experimental group		Control group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Attitudes towards learning in both writing classes	24.11	3.00	19.84	4.94
Attitudes towards grammar improvement	26.97	3.69	21.16	5.26
Attitudes towards writing skill improvement	28.19	3.74	22.59	3.25

Table 7: Comparison of Independent-samples T-Test results for attitudes towards learning in both classes, grammar improvement and writing skill improvement between Experimental and Control groups

Conditions	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Attitudes towards learning in both writing classes	-4.446	71	.007	-4.273	.961	-6.190	-2.357
Attitudes towards grammar improvement	-5.447	71	.000	-5.810	1.067	-7.937	-3.683
Attitudes towards writing skills improvement	-6.823	71	.000	-5.600	0.821	-7.236	-3.963

A total score of responses to questions 7 to 13 was used to determine students' attitudes towards their improvement in grammar. There was a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes towards their improvement in grammar between the experimental and control groups ($t = -5.447$, $df = 71$, $p < .01$). On average, the total score for the experimental group was 26.97 (SD = 3.69). The total score for the control group was 21.16 (SD = 5.26).

A total score of responses to questions 14 to 20 was used to determine students' attitudes towards improvement in writing skills. There was a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes towards cooperative learning between the experimental and control group ($t = -6.823$, $df = 71$, $p < .05$). On average, the total score for the experimental group was 28.19 (SD = 3.74). The total score for control group was 22.59 (SD = 3.25). Results were shown in Table 7.

Discussion

From the results, video podcast lessons in the Moodle class improved the writing abilities of the EFL students effectively. The students in the experimental group had a higher mean score in the post-test than those in the control group. The students in the experimental group also had more positive attitudes towards the e-learning tools than those in the control group. Grammar and writing discussions appeared to lead to improvements in English grammar and writing. This corresponds with research in higher education; for example, Tynan and Colbran (2006) noted that students reported that podcast lesson summaries were a valuable tool that helped them understand information associated with a particular course. Studies also indicated, at the higher education level, a perception that podcast lesson summaries had helped students secure a higher grade in the class in which they were used (Sanders, McNierney & Hazy, 2008; Tynan & Colbran, 2006; Vess, 2006).

The students' grammatical and writing competence improved after the experiment when they were given opportunities to attend video podcast lessons in Moodle class for studying and discussions. Based on their feedback, video podcast lessons and Moodle platform were e-learning tools which can be accessed easily to study or review the writing lessons, discuss and work collaboratively in the platform to practice their English writing before taking the writing test. The functions available in Moodle can help support these activities. All modes of discourse can be explored and supported by using multimedia. This means that students can use photo or video images together with field notes, a summary, and drafts of their essays. When student discussions are finished, drafts of their writing can be posted on the Moodle for the peers to access and respond to.

As reported by Robertson (2008), by integrating Moodle into a writing course, instructors gain benefit in terms of organisation, implementation, distribution, communication and

assessment. This means that interesting and motivating course materials, and assignments can be included in one platform and can be easily revised and restructured. This e-learning tool helps manage all communication between instructors, individual students and peers, in addition to providing a means of maintaining and displaying students' writing records. In terms of video podcasts, Tynan and Colbran (2006) noted that students reported that podcast lesson summaries were a valuable tool that helped them understand information associated with a particular course. Studies also showed that at the higher education level, a perception that podcast lesson summaries helped students secure a higher grade in the class in which they were used.

The findings of the present and previous studies show the effectiveness of video podcast lessons in Moodle class as a tool for language learning. In this study, the learning achievement resulted from the opportunities to study grammar in writing context via video podcast lessons and to have discussions in Moodle class.

The results of this study showed that after learning grammar in the writing context via video podcast lessons, most of the students had discussions about the use of English syntax in Moodle class, and it is possible that this process helped them improve their writing competence. This is congruent with previous studies which revealed that grammar teaching helped the students improve their writing abilities (Heap, 1991; Williams, 1995).

The findings showed that the development of the students' grammatical and writing competence resulted from many features of a video podcast and Moodle platform that help the students to discuss, work together, and share their ideas with the lecturer and their classmates. As a result, it can be inferred that this learning process occurs due to the application of social constructivist theory, which proposes that knowledge is created through the social interaction among the lecturers and students. This constructivism perspective takes the view that students learn as they work to understand their experiences and create meaning. In the social constructivist model, lecturers are knowers who design a curriculum to support a self-directed, collaborative search for meanings. A video podcast and Moodle platform can play the role of a community of practice as students can study the contents and discuss their obstacles regarding English grammar and writing with the lecturer or other classmates. In this process, the lecturer or other students with high English proficiency support the less proficient students to improve their writing skills and develop their grammar knowledge by themselves. As a result, they create and discover new knowledge and achieve the learning objectives through collaborative interaction and construction of shared knowledge with more proficient people in the Moodle community. This is because features of Moodle were designed to support a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning, which covers inquiry-based learning, collaborative interaction and construction of shared knowledge (Brandl, 2005).

All of these results seem to make clear the benefit of grammar teaching since the reduction of errors as well as the ability to identify grammatical rules can lead to better writing competence. The study purports that teaching grammar when embedded into writing instruction helps in the development of writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the t-test, it can be concluded that the learning achievement of English grammar and writing in the experimental group is higher than that of the control group at a significance level of 0.00. Secondly, the students in the experimental group had higher scores in the post-test at a significant level. There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores in the grammar section and in the writing section. This shows that the students' grammatical and writing competence had improved. Thirdly, the

correlation of the increased scores in the grammar and writing sections were significant in the pre-test and in the post-test. From this, it can be inferred that the students' grammatical competence had a relationship with their writing competence. Finally, the students had positive attitudes towards video podcast lessons and Moodle and learners generally have positive perception of these technologies.

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