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Personalizing Learning through Technology in EFL Context

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Abstract

Technology has revolutionized the field of EFL education, offering innovative ways to personalize learning and enhance student engagement. The efficacy of technology in language instruction has been demonstrated, including its capacity to serve as a source of motivation and facilitate authentic learning. This study explores how various technological tools and platforms can create individualized learning experiences for ESL students. Adaptive learning platforms like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone tailor lessons to individual proficiency levels, providing immediate feedback and customized learning paths. Gamified tools such as Kahoot! and Quizlet engage students through interactive quizzes and games, reinforcing language concepts in a fun and motivating way. Nevertheless, there are still drawbacks to utilizing technology in the classroom. Students may become readily distracted and may misuse the technology. In addition, the potential for students to consider critically may be restricted by their frequent use of technology. This study also addresses personal learning potential drawbacks, including access and equity issues, over-reliance on technology, privacy and data security concerns, technical issues, and variability in content quality. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, as not all students have equal access to technological resources. Balancing technology integration with traditional teaching methods and addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the benefits of technology in EFL education. By doing so, educators can create more engaging, effective, and equitable learning experiences for all EFL students.

Keywords:

Gamification, Kahoot,
Technology, Foreign
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Introduction

In the digital era, technology has permeated virtually every aspect of our lives, including education. Technology has emerged as a transformative force in language learning and instruction, and English Language Teaching (ELT) is no exception. Incorporating technology in ELT has transformed conventional teaching methodologies, opened up new opportunities for language acquisition, and empowered both learners and educators. (Nguyen & Elliott, 2019). The unprecedented opportunities for language learners to engage with English in innovative and immersive ways have been made possible by the rapid advancement of technology. Interactive software, online platforms, mobile applications, and virtual reality tools have supplemented and, in numerous instances, replaced conventional language learning resources, including textbooks and worksheets. These technological advancements have not only improved language acquisition but also initiated a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of English. Today, educators are confronted with an increase in the number of students utilizing mobile technology to acquire foreign languages beyond the confines of the curriculum. To access applications such as YouTube, they employ mobile devices. Students can establish self-directed learning approaches (Lai et al., 2022).

The widespread use of technology or Information and Communication Technology (ICT) allows for more engaging and effective teaching methods. This is particularly beneficial for English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, where students from various backgrounds aim to improve their communication skills. Technology offers a wealth of resources, from real-world videos to interactive exercises, that can make learning more enjoyable and productive. Additionally, it facilitates collaboration and communication with native speakers, fostering a more immersive learning experience. Since today's students are comfortable with technology, integrating it into the classroom caters to their learning style and increases motivation. This paper will delve into the advantages and disadvantages of using technology in ESL classrooms, focusing on how it can be harnessed to maximize its potential for effective language learning.

Integrating technology in the ESL classroom offers unprecedented opportunities for personalizing learning experiences and enhancing student engagement, motivation, and overall educational outcomes. Personalized learning, a pedagogical approach that tailors educational experiences to individual student needs, preferences, and abilities, has gained significant traction in recent years. Technological tools and platforms play a crucial role in this approach, enabling educators to customize instruction in previously unimaginable ways. Technology offers many resources to cater to ESL students' unique learning styles and paces, from adaptive learning platforms that adjust content based on student performance to gamified tools that make learning interactive and enjoyable.

However, the implementation of technology in ESL education is not without challenges. Issues such as access and equity, over-reliance on digital tools, privacy concerns, and the quality of educational content must be carefully considered to ensure that technology enhances rather than hinders the learning process. This paper explores how technology can be utilized to personalize learning for ESL students, examining the opportunities and potential drawbacks. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this study offers insights into how educators can effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices to support and enhance ESL learning.

Literature Review

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

It has been demonstrated that integrating technology into classroom instruction and student learning enhances learning (Ahmadi, 2018). The mobile market is undergoing significant transformations, notably in the context of language learning, due to the rapid advancements in mobile technology (Yurdagül & Öz, 2018). The utilization of technology in the language learning process has been reported to enhance motivation, reduce anxiety, and facilitate cooperative learning. A study has also demonstrated that integrating technology into language learning can promote cooperative learning, develop language skills, and enhance communication. Additionally, students can profit from using technology in language learning by utilizing class time more efficiently and individually, enabling them to work at their own pace (Chen, 2015). Technology has been discovered to enhance learners' motivation, increase confidence, and promote autonomy in learning a foreign language (Widyana et al., 2022). Moreover, the influence of technology on language acquisition is widely recognized, as it has revolutionized the process by facilitating excessive communication through technological devices both within and outside the classroom (Hanif & Sajid, 2020). Mobile technologies have been considered advantageous for language acquisition, particularly in the context and circumstances (Yurdagül & Öz, 2018). Furthermore, it has been discovered that technology-based language teaching activities facilitate students' proficiency in language communication (Barzani et al., 2021). In general, integrating technology into language learning has been demonstrated to have various advantages, such as the promotion of cooperative learning, the enhancement of motivation, the reduction of anxiety, the promotion of communication, and the development of language skills. Additionally, the language-learning process has been transformed both within and outside the classroom due to the increased autonomy, confidence, and motivation of learners, which technology has facilitated.

The literature has extensively investigated the transformative potential of technology's integration into language acquisition. A study conducted on 42 lower

intermediate EFL learners, who were divided into an experimental group and a control group, demonstrated that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has a beneficial effect on language proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, and listening and speaking skills (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017). The research also discovered a correlation between the development of literacy skills and the time spent working with computers, indicating that using computer-based technologies can improve language acquisition. CALL offers learners interactive and multimedia resources that improve motivation, engagement, and autonomous learning (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Learners can achieve more effective language learning outcomes by utilizing immediate feedback, personalized learning pathways, and access to authentic materials. Mobile learning has also garnered attention in the literature as a potent instrument for language acquisition. Research suggests that mobile learning applications and platforms facilitate independent and flexible learning, enhancing learner autonomy (Kukulska-Hulme, 2018). Currently, learners have access to many websites and applications that provide authentic English language materials due to the widespread use of mobile devices connected to the internet. Learners can exploit microlearning opportunities to optimize their exposure to and practice the target language throughout the day.

Technology and Motivation

In order to guarantee engaging lessons, numerous ESL instructors have implemented more engaging and engaging teaching methodologies (Morat et al., 2016). One of the factors that has been identified as a significant factor in the success of second language acquisition is motivation. Motivation is a stimulant that is used to attain a specific objective. The two forms of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is inherent to the individual and is associated with a sense of well-being, whereas extrinsic motivation originates from external sources (Ng & Ng, 2015). ESL learners are granted the freedom, motivation, and encouragement necessary for the learning process by employing a variety of technology apparatus (Roy, 2019). The popularity of technology equipment, such as videos, is likely due to their capacity to present in audio and visual formats (Canning-Wilson & Wallace, 2000). This approach can enhance learners' motivation, as they perceive the teaching and learning session as engaging. Morat, Shaari, and Abidin (2016) conducted a study demonstrating the sustainability of student's motivation to learn due to technology implementation. Blachowicz et al. (2009) conducted a study to investigate the technology used by students, the dynamics and teacher-centered choices in technology use, the student learning processes, and the perceptions and beliefs of students and teachers regarding technology. The results indicated that the students were vigilant and motivated while working on their tasks.

Loewen et al. (2019) focus on mobile-assisted language learning, specifically investigating the effectiveness of large-scale commercial language learning apps like

Duolingo. The research found that participants studying Turkish on Duolingo showed improved L2 measures and a positive correlation between time spent on the app and learning gains. While the participants viewed Duolingo's flexibility and gamification aspects positively, the study also highlighted variability in motivation and frustration with instructional materials. This evidence aligns with the idea that technology, such as Duolingo, can sustain students' motivation to learn by offering engaging and flexible learning experiences, ultimately contributing to positive learning outcomes.

Wang et al. (2023) delve into the potential impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on international students in higher education, focusing on generative AI, chatbots, analytics, and international student success. The study offers insights into how AI can enhance educational experiences for international students and improve learning processes. By exploring the integration of AI into educational administration and learning processes, the research sheds light on the sustainability of motivation in students' learning journeys. This aligns with the notion that technology implementation, such as AI, can positively influence students' motivation and enhance educational experiences. In the following section, personal learning opportunities are discussed.

Adaptive Learning Platforms

Adaptive learning platforms like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone have revolutionized ESL education by tailoring educational content to individual student needs. These platforms dynamically adjust lesson difficulty based on student performance, providing a customized learning experience that enhances language acquisition (Richter, 2022). Duolingo's gamified approach, incorporating elements like points and rewards, maintains student engagement and motivation, while its adaptive algorithms personalize learning paths (Amin, 2021). Research indicates that consistent use of such platforms can significantly improve language proficiency (Duman et al., 2014; Richter, 2022). Similarly, Rosetta Stone's immersive techniques adjust feedback and exercises based on learner responses, promoting long-term language retention and proficiency. However, the effectiveness of these platforms also depends on their implementation and context, as they may not fully replace the personalized support of human instructors (Richter, 2022). Duman et al. (2014) emphasize the popularity of teaching vocabulary using mobile devices like cell phones and PDAs, aligning with the paragraph's focus on adaptive learning platforms like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone, tailoring lessons to individual proficiency levels. The research's emphasis on applied and design-based studies adopting quantitative methods resonates with the personalized and data-driven approach of adaptive technologies in enhancing language learning experiences. This supports the notion that adaptive learning platforms leverage technology to address individual learning needs, aligning with the advancements in artificial intelligence to personalize ESL

education effectively. Overall, adaptive learning platforms offer significant potential for personalizing ESL education, making it more accessible and practical for diverse learners.

Interactive and Engaging Tools

Interactive and engaging tools have become integral to modern ESL classrooms, offering innovative ways to enhance student participation and motivation. Gamified learning platforms such as Kahoot! and Quizlet have gained popularity for their ability to transform traditional learning activities into dynamic and enjoyable experiences. These tools use game-based learning principles to create quizzes, flashcards, and other interactive activities that reinforce language skills while maintaining high levels of student engagement.

Kahoot, for example, allows educators to create interactive quizzes that students can use on their own devices. This platform promotes a competitive yet collaborative learning environment, which can lead to increased motivation and better retention of language concepts (Huang & Hew, 2021). Research has shown that gamified learning can significantly improve student outcomes by making learning more enjoyable and interactive (Ebadi et al., 2023).

Similarly, Quizlet offers a range of study tools, including flashcards, games, and practice tests, which can be customized to meet the specific needs of ESL learners. The platform's adaptive learning algorithm helps students focus on areas where they need the most improvement, thereby personalizing the learning experience. Studies have demonstrated that digital flashcards and other interactive tools can enhance vocabulary acquisition and retention in language learners (Dizon, 2016).

Despite their many benefits, interactive tools also present specific challenges. For instance, their effectiveness depends on their proper implementation and integration into the curriculum. Educators must be adequately trained to use these tools effectively and ensure they complement rather than replace traditional teaching methods (Turkle, 2015). Additionally, the reliance on digital tools raises concerns about screen time and the potential for reduced face-to-face interactions (Eynon & Malmberg, 2021).

Overall, interactive and engaging tools offer significant potential to enhance ESL education by making learning more enjoyable and tailored to individual needs. By incorporating these tools into their teaching practices, educators can create more dynamic and effective learning environments that cater to their students' diverse needs.

Challenges of technology for personalized learning

Technology distraction in the EFL classroom

Teaching in the ELT classroom of the present day may be more challenging than ever. Our classrooms are being significantly disrupted by technology. We are currently confronted with portable computers, mobile devices, tablets, and digital recorders/players for students. Distraction is merely the internal intention of the mind to engage the individual. The individual does not fulfill the obligation; instead, they focus on extraneous environmental phenomena that result in diversion, which can be defined as the inability to focus on study and instead focus on other activities (Aligolbandi et al., 2015).

An individual's attention is most effective when they concentrate on a single endeavor at a time. Nevertheless, most younger generations have adopted the practice of multitasking due to the numerous competing sources that vie for their attention, both within and outside of the classroom (Carrier et al., 2009). While completing coursework, numerous students remark engaging in online shopping or browsing the internet. Learners who employ their mobile devices are also inclined to engage in social media implementation (Lenhart et al., 2010). In the classroom, the use of mobile phones for social media or other non-academic activities may pose a threat to learning.

Implementing student mobile phones in classroom environments has led to a decline in academic performance and instructional satisfaction (Dietz & Henrich, 2014). Tablets, smartphones, and laptops are the most frequently employed devices in universities and colleges for educational purposes. The introduction of modern technology in the classroom setting has resulted in adverse outcomes, even though the intended objectives of these tools are to enhance the student's educational experience (Junco, 2012). The following section presents the challenges of technology for personalized learning.

Access and Equity Issues

The digital divide remains a significant challenge in integrating technology in education. Not all students have equal access to technology and high-speed internet, which can exacerbate existing inequalities (Warschauer, 2004). Schools in underfunded areas might lack the technological infrastructure to implement personalized learning effectively. This disparity can lead to unequal learning opportunities and outcomes, as students without access to technology may fall behind their peers. To address these issues, policymakers and educators must focus on providing equitable access to technological resources and ensuring that all students benefit from personalized learning tools (Van Dijk, 2020). Studies have shown that addressing the digital divide is crucial for ensuring equitable educational outcomes (Eynon & Geniets, 2016).

Over-Reliance on Technology

While technology offers numerous benefits, there is a risk of over-reliance, which can reduce face-to-face interactions crucial for language learning. Human interaction is essential for developing conversational skills and cultural understanding, aspects that technology alone cannot fully replicate (Turkle, 2016). Additionally, students may become overly dependent on technological tools, potentially neglecting the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. To mitigate these risks, educators should balance technology use and traditional teaching methods, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces human interaction (Eynon & Geniets, 2016). Research indicates that excess screen time can negatively impact cognitive development and social skills (Reinhardt, 2019).

Technical Issues and Maintenance

Technical difficulties, such as software glitches, internet connectivity problems, and hardware malfunctions, can disrupt learning. Regular updates, maintenance, and technical support are necessary to ensure the smooth operation of educational technologies (Hassler et al., 2016). These requirements can be costly and require ongoing investment, posing a challenge for schools with limited budgets. To address these issues, schools should invest in reliable technology and provide adequate training and support for teachers and students. Additionally, having a contingency plan for technical disruptions can help minimize their impact on learning (Hassler et al., 2016). Research highlights the importance of professional development and ongoing technical support in maximizing the benefits of educational technology (Tondeur et al., 2017). They found that teachers' confidence and competence in using technology are critical factors in its successful integration.

Quality of Content

The quality and accuracy of content provided by educational apps and platforms can vary significantly. Ensuring that materials are pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate is crucial for effective learning (Zhao et al., 2015). One-size-fits-all solutions may not fully address the unique needs of every student, leading to a less practical learning experience (Scherer et al., 2019). Educators should carefully select and review the materials used in their classrooms to ensure high-quality content. Collaboration with content developers and continuous feedback can also help improve the quality and relevance of educational materials (Hodges et al., 2020). Research by Reinhardt (2019) emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching materials in language education.

Discussion and Conclusion

Integrating technology in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms presents a transformative shift in educational methodologies. As the introduction highlights, technology offers unparalleled opportunities for personalized learning, enhancing student engagement, motivation, and educational outcomes. This discussion elaborates on technology integration's advantages and potential drawbacks, focusing on adaptive learning platforms, interactive tools, and the challenges of ensuring equitable access and avoiding over-reliance on technology.

Adaptive learning platforms such as Duolingo and Rosetta Stone exemplify the potential of technology to personalize ESL education. These platforms dynamically adjust the difficulty of lessons based on student performance, offering a tailored learning experience that promotes language acquisition (Richter, 2022). Research has shown that consistently using these platforms significantly improves language proficiency (Duman et al., 2014; Richter, 2022). These tools exemplify how technology can cater to individual learning styles and paces, which is crucial for diverse ESL learners. Interactive tools like Kahoot! and Quizlet have revolutionized the ESL classroom by making learning more engaging and enjoyable. (Huang & Hew, 2021). These tools foster an interactive learning environment, encouraging active participation and sustained engagement.

Despite the benefits, the digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable technology integration. Not all students have access to the necessary technology and high-speed internet, leading to disparities in learning opportunities (Warschauer, 2004; Van Dijk, 2020). Schools in underfunded areas may lack the infrastructure to implement personalized learning effectively, exacerbating existing inequalities. Addressing these issues requires focused efforts from policymakers and educators to provide equitable access to technological resources (Eynon & Geniets, 2016). Over-reliance on technology can diminish essential face-to-face interactions crucial for language learning, such as developing conversational skills and cultural understanding (Turkle, 2016). Excessive dependence on digital tools may also hinder the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Educators should balance technology with traditional teaching methods to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces human interaction (Eynon & Geniets, 2016). Technical difficulties, including software glitches and internet connectivity issues, can disrupt learning (Hassler et al., 2016). Regular maintenance and technical support are necessary to ensure the smooth operation of educational technologies, posing a challenge for schools with limited budgets. Additionally, the quality and accuracy of content provided by educational apps can vary significantly, necessitating careful selection and review by educators to ensure pedagogical soundness and cultural appropriateness (Zhao et al., 2015; Scherer et al., 2019).

Integrating technology in ESL education offers substantial benefits by personalizing learning experiences and enhancing student engagement and motivation. However, the challenges of access, over-reliance, technical issues, and content quality

must be carefully managed to ensure that technology enhances the learning process. By addressing these challenges, educators can effectively harness the potential of technology to support and improve ESL learning outcomes.

Declarations

Availability of data and materials

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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