



USING TECHNOLOGY IN EFL CLASSROOMS: ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Technology has profoundly reshaped the landscape of modern education, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is no exception. From interactive applications and digital storytelling tools to AI-powered writing assistants and virtual exchange programs, the possibilities for technology-enhanced language learning have never been greater. This article examines both the significant advantages and the real challenges that arise when technology is integrated into EFL classrooms. It explores how digital tools can boost student motivation, expand access to authentic language input, foster learner autonomy, and facilitate meaningful collaboration — while also confronting honest concerns about distraction, digital inequality, inadequate teacher preparation, and the risk of technology becoming an end in itself rather than a means to learning. The article concludes by advocating for a principled, pedagogically grounded approach to technology integration that keeps effective language learning firmly at the center.

Keywords: EFL classroom, educational technology, digital tools, language teaching.

Introduction

Consider how differently a language learner in 2025 experiences the world compared to one in 1995. Three decades ago, exposure to authentic English outside the classroom meant hunting for imported films, struggling to tune into shortwave radio broadcasts, or waiting weeks for a penpal's handwritten letter. Today, that same learner carries a device in their pocket that provides instant access to millions of hours of English audio and video, connects them with native speakers across the globe, and offers AI-powered feedback on their pronunciation — all for free.

This transformation is not merely technological. It is pedagogical. The tools available to EFL teachers and students today make possible forms of learning that were previously unimaginable, and they challenge us to rethink some of our most fundamental assumptions about what a language classroom can and should look like.



Yet enthusiasm for technology in education is often uncritical. New tools are adopted quickly, sometimes without careful thought about whether they genuinely serve learning or simply create the appearance of modernity. As Warschauer and Healey (1998) observed in the early days of computer-assisted language learning, technology in itself is neither good nor bad — what matters is how, and why, it is used.

This article takes a balanced view. It acknowledges the genuine and substantial benefits that technology can bring to EFL classrooms while also examining the challenges that teachers, institutions, and students must navigate. The goal is not to celebrate or critique technology as such, but to think carefully about the conditions under which it can most effectively support language learning.

Theoretical Background

The integration of technology into language teaching has a history stretching back to the 1960s, when early computer programs were used for drill-and-practice grammar exercises. This early phase — now called Behavioristic CALL — gave way in subsequent decades to more communicative approaches, as scholars recognized that meaningful interaction, not mechanical repetition, is the engine of language acquisition (Blake, 2013).

Today, technology-enhanced language learning is informed by several converging theoretical traditions. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes authentic interaction and real-world language use — goals that technology can powerfully support through access to genuine materials and global communication networks (Richards, 2006). Sociocultural theory, rooted in Vygotsky's work, highlights the importance of collaboration and mediated learning — both of which online platforms and collaborative tools can facilitate. And self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggests that learner autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental to motivation — dimensions that well-designed digital environments can address directly.

Understanding these theoretical foundations helps teachers make better decisions about which technologies to adopt and how to deploy them. Technology selected on purely practical or aesthetic grounds — because it is popular, or looks impressive — rarely integrates well into principled language teaching. Technology selected because it genuinely supports interaction, authentic input, or learner agency is a different matter.

Advantages of Using Technology in EFL Classrooms

1. Increased Student Motivation and Engagement

Perhaps the most immediately visible benefit of technology in EFL classrooms is its effect on student engagement. Lessons that incorporate interactive elements — educational games, multimedia presentations, online



polls, digital storytelling — tend to generate more visible enthusiasm than their paper-based equivalents. This is not simply because screens are inherently exciting; it is because well-designed digital activities often embed language practice within contexts that feel meaningful and purposeful to learners.

Platforms such as Kahoot!, Quizlet Live, and Gimkit, for instance, transform vocabulary review into a competitive, social experience. Students who would disengage during a traditional matching exercise may find themselves genuinely absorbed in the same task when it is gamified. Similarly, tools like Flipgrid, which invites students to record and share short video responses, create a real audience for spoken language — a powerful motivator for learners who might otherwise see classroom speaking tasks as performative and artificial.

It is worth noting, however, that novelty wears off. The motivational boost that comes from using a new app or platform tends to diminish once students become accustomed to it. Sustainable motivation requires not just engaging tools, but engaging tasks — and the two are not the same thing.

2. Access to Authentic Language Materials

One of the most transformative gifts of the internet era is the sheer abundance of authentic English-language content it has placed within reach of learners everywhere. Podcasts on every conceivable topic, live news broadcasts, documentary films, academic lectures, comedy shows, political speeches, song lyrics, and social media posts — all of this represents language as it is actually used, by real people, for real purposes.

Exposure to authentic materials matters because it exposes learners to the full complexity of natural language: contracted forms, idiomatic expressions, regional accents, discourse markers, and the rhythms of spontaneous speech that no textbook dialogue can fully replicate. As Richards (2006) notes, authentic input is essential for developing genuine communicative competence — the ability to understand and be understood in real-world situations.

Teachers can harness this abundance in structured ways. Listening activities built around TED Talks allow students to engage with sophisticated ideas while developing academic listening skills. News-based reading tasks using sources like the BBC Learning English website combine authentic language with carefully scaffolded support. Even YouTube comment sections, approached critically, can become sites of genuine linguistic and cultural inquiry.

3. Development of Learner Autonomy

Digital technologies have significantly expanded the possibilities for self-directed language learning. Students can now pursue language development outside classroom hours in ways that match their individual



interests, learning styles, and schedules. A student passionate about football can follow English-language sports journalism. A music lover can study lyrics, look up unfamiliar vocabulary, and sing along to develop pronunciation. A prospective university student can practice academic writing using AI feedback tools before submitting to a teacher.

Applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Anki support systematic vocabulary development outside the classroom. Online writing platforms with built-in revision tools, such as Grammarly, help learners identify recurring errors independently. Virtual conversation partners, accessible through platforms like iTalki or Tandem, allow students to practice spoken English with native speakers around the world.

This capacity for independent learning is not just convenient — it is pedagogically significant. Students who take ownership of their language learning tend to progress faster and retain more than those who depend entirely on classroom instruction (Brown, 2007). Technology, at its best, shifts the locus of learning from the teacher to the learner — empowering students to pursue proficiency on their own terms.

4. Enhanced Communication and Collaboration

Digital tools have dissolved many of the spatial and temporal boundaries that once constrained language learning. A class in Uzbekistan can now collaborate in real time with a class in the United Kingdom; students can receive written feedback from their teacher within hours rather than days; a shy student who would never raise their hand in class can participate actively in an online discussion forum.

Collaborative platforms such as Google Docs enable students to co-author texts, comment on each other's drafts, and track revisions in real time — creating a visible record of the collaborative writing process. Video conferencing tools like Zoom have made virtual exchange programs feasible even for schools with limited international connections. Discussion boards and messaging platforms extend the conversation beyond the classroom, allowing ideas to develop at the pace of thought rather than the pace of a lesson schedule.

These affordances align well with communicative approaches to language teaching, which emphasize interaction, negotiation of meaning, and authentic communication as the primary vehicles of language acquisition.

5. Personalized and Differentiated Learning

A significant but sometimes overlooked advantage of technology is its capacity to support differentiated instruction. In a class of thirty students with varying proficiency levels, learning styles, and linguistic backgrounds, meeting every student's needs simultaneously is genuinely difficult. Technology can



help by enabling students to work at their own pace, receive immediate and personalized feedback, and access materials calibrated to their individual level.

Adaptive learning platforms, such as DreamBox or Carnegie Learning (in mathematics, but increasingly in language education), use algorithms to adjust the difficulty and type of tasks based on student performance. AI-powered writing feedback tools can identify patterns in individual students' errors and target their practice accordingly. Even something as simple as providing differentiated reading texts in multiple formats — audio, visual, abridged, extended — allows teachers to serve diverse learners more effectively.

Challenges of Using Technology in EFL Classrooms

1. Technical Problems and Infrastructure Limitations

The most immediate challenge for many EFL teachers is simply making technology work. Slow or unstable internet connections, outdated devices, incompatible software, blocked websites, and insufficient technical support can transform a carefully planned digital lesson into an exercise in frustration. These are not theoretical concerns — they are the daily reality for teachers in many schools around the world, including in contexts that might be assumed to be well-resourced.

Technical difficulties do not just waste time. They undermine student confidence in the technology, reduce teachers' willingness to take future risks with digital tools, and can create the impression that the lesson was poorly planned. Building in contingency plans — having non-digital backup activities ready, downloading materials in advance for offline use, checking equipment before class — is not optional; it is an essential part of responsible digital pedagogy.

2. Student Distraction and Off-Task Behavior

The same device that gives a student access to a vocabulary exercise also gives them access to social media, messaging applications, online games, and an infinite supply of entertainment. Managing this reality is one of the most significant behavioral challenges of technology-integrated teaching. Research suggests that even the mere presence of a smartphone on a desk — even face down and switched off — reduces available cognitive capacity (Ward et al., 2017), raising questions about how deeply students are engaging when devices are in use.

There are no simple solutions. Banning devices entirely sacrifices the benefits of technology. Permitting unrestricted access invites off-task behavior. Most experienced teachers navigate this through a combination of clear, consistently enforced expectations; engaging tasks that make off-task behavior less attractive; strategic physical arrangement of the classroom; and software tools that allow monitoring of student screens. The underlying principle is that



the quality of the task matters as much as the rules around the device.

3. Insufficient Teacher Training and Digital Competence

Technology integration places significant new demands on teachers. It is not enough to know how to use a particular application — effective digital pedagogy requires understanding how to select tools that genuinely serve learning objectives, how to manage a classroom in which students are working on multiple platforms simultaneously, how to troubleshoot technical problems under pressure, and how to assess learning that takes place in digital environments.

As Hubbard (2008) argues, successful technology integration requires both technical and pedagogical competence — and these are not the same thing. A teacher who is technically proficient but pedagogically underprepared may use digital tools in ways that are superficially impressive but educationally shallow. Conversely, a skilled teacher who lacks technical confidence may avoid digital tools entirely, missing out on their genuine benefits.

Professional development for teachers must therefore address both dimensions — and it must be ongoing. Technology evolves rapidly; what constitutes digital competence today may look quite different in five years. Institutions that provide initial training but no continuing support are setting their teachers up to fall behind.

4. Digital Inequality and Unequal Access

Perhaps the most troubling challenge associated with technology in education is the way it can reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities. Students from more affluent families are more likely to have personal devices, reliable home internet, and the technical literacy that comes from regular exposure to digital tools. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack all of these.

This divide — sometimes called the "digital divide" — became starkly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the sudden shift to online learning left many students without the means to participate. A student without a device, or with only a shared family phone and a slow mobile connection, could not engage meaningfully with a video-heavy online curriculum designed for broadband users with personal laptops.

Educational institutions bear a responsibility to address this inequality proactively — through device lending programs, provision of connectivity support, and the design of digital activities that can function in low-bandwidth environments. Ignoring the digital divide does not make it disappear; it simply means that technology-enhanced education benefits those who are already advantaged.

5. Over-Reliance on Technology and Pedagogical Shallowness



A subtler but significant risk is the tendency to use technology for its own sake — to adopt every new platform and application without asking whether it genuinely improves learning. When technology becomes the goal rather than the means, lessons may look impressive while producing limited learning outcomes. Students fill in digital worksheets instead of paper ones; teachers present information with animated slides instead of chalk — but the underlying pedagogy remains transmission-based and passive.

Technology does not automatically make teaching better. It amplifies what is already present: a thoughtful, interactive, student-centered lesson becomes more powerful with the right digital tools; a poorly designed lesson remains poorly designed, regardless of how many applications are involved.

Toward a Principled Approach to Technology Integration

Given the complexity of both the advantages and challenges outlined above, what would a genuinely principled approach to technology in EFL classrooms look like?

Several principles emerge from the research and from classroom experience. First, **start with the learning objective, not the tool**. The question to ask is not "How can I incorporate technology into this lesson?" but "What do I want students to learn, and is there a technological tool that would help them learn it more effectively than a non-digital alternative?" Second, **combine technology with strong pedagogy**. Digital tools are most effective when embedded in lessons that already reflect good teaching practice — clear objectives, meaningful tasks, appropriate scaffolding, and thoughtful assessment. Third, **prepare students to use technology critically**. Digital literacy — the ability to evaluate online sources, recognize bias, protect privacy, and use technology responsibly — is itself a crucial 21st-century competency that EFL teachers are well-positioned to develop.

Finally, **be willing to put the technology away**. Not every lesson benefits from digital tools, and the best teachers know when to close the laptops, set aside the phones, and create the conditions for the kind of unhurried, attentive, human conversation that no application has yet managed to replicate.

Conclusion

Technology has become a permanent and powerful presence in EFL classrooms, and there is no going back. The question is not whether to use it, but how to use it wisely — in ways that genuinely serve language learning rather than simply creating the appearance of modernity.

The advantages are real and substantial: greater access to authentic materials, stronger motivation, expanded opportunities for learner autonomy, more flexible communication, and the possibility of genuinely personalized instruction. The challenges are equally real: technical unreliability, distraction,



inadequate teacher preparation, digital inequality, and the ever-present risk of prioritizing tools over teaching.

What the research and practice consistently suggest is that technology works best when it is chosen deliberately, used purposefully, and embedded in a broader pedagogical vision that keeps the learner — not the device — at the center. English teachers who approach technology with this kind of thoughtful intentionality are not just keeping up with the times. They are preparing their students for a world in which the ability to use digital tools wisely, critically, and creatively will be as important as the ability to speak and write the language itself.

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