INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL TOOLS INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract
The integration of digital tools in language teaching and learning has emerged as a transformative paradigm within the educational sector, significantly reshaping pedagogical practices and learner experiences. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with the incorporation of digital technologies into English language education in higher education contexts. The transition from conventional face-to-face instruction to online learning frameworks, facilitated by digital technologies and internet connectivity, presents considerable challenges for both educators and learners. Nonetheless, this transformation also offers numerous opportunities for enhancing language education. Employing a narrative literature review methodology, this study identifies key challenges—including disparities in access to technology, pedagogical adjustments, engagement issues, and cultural considerations—as well as opportunities such as flexibility, enriched resource availability, enhanced engagement through multimedia, and increased cultural awareness. This narrative review approach was chosen for its capacity to synthesize complex information from multiple disciplines, providing a comprehensive overview of existing research. Furthermore, this research provides valuable insights into the complexities of integrating digital technology into higher education language teaching, particularly in light of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings advocate for the development of strategic frameworks that will support the effective integration of digital tools, ultimately fostering an inclusive and dynamic language learning environment that prepares students to navigate the complexities of a globalized, digital landscape. **Keywords:** *Digital Tools, Language Teaching, Pedagogy, Technology Integration.*

Introduction

English has been generally recognized as one of the most extensively used and preferred languages in the context of cultural globalization (Ngoasong, 2022). In recent years, the implementation of English as a medium of instruction has become more prominent in the educational systems worldwide, as observed across various countries, including those where English is considered a second and official language (Abdu, 2018). This trend is particularly noticeable in a developing nation like Nigeria, where educational institutions and policymakers have taken proactive measures to integrate English into the curriculum across different academic levels. Its adoption as a medium of instruction is driven by the belief that language proficiency equips learners with skills that are highly valued in the global job market as an effort to improve socio-economic mobility and international competitiveness (Horn & Staker, 2021). On the other hand, the connection between technology and learning has become increasingly evident in recent years when educational technologies are introduced in various sectors, including industry, charity, health, and education, particularly to enhance the learning process. Traditional teaching methods are deemed to be less successful in capturing students' interest, causing a decrease in learning engagement (Almusharraf, 2022). The lack of innovative and imaginative approaches poses a notable challenge in maintaining students' active involvement in class (Chik, 2020). The fact that the present society is surrounded by technology indicates that it encourages the incorporation of technology in education. Adeyemi (2021) pointed out that in accordance with the 21st-century learning p

aradigm, it is crucial for educators to prioritize approaches that promote active learning. As tech nology continues to evolve, teachers may need to be updated with the knowledge of using digita l tools that enhance teaching and learning. In fact, the competency of incorporating these digital tools into their instructional design ensures that they are aligned with effective pedagogical prac tices. As highlighted by Nguyen, Yang & Patel (2023), students' reception in classrooms depen ds on teaching quality. Ultimately, teachers should leverage their expertise in technology, peda gogy, and content to facilitate learning and achieve course objectives (Torky, 2021). The refore, incorporating technology into both in- and out-of-class has allowed English language lea rning to become more relevant since a population well-versed in technology is important for a c ountry's sustainable and successful development (Zhang & Wang, 2023). The fact that the pres ent society is surrounded by technology indicates that it encourages the incorporation of technol ogy in education. Yilmaz (2021) pointed out that in accordance with the 21st-century learning p aradigm, it is crucial for educators to prioritize approaches that promote active learning. Moreo ver, by utilizing technological tools, language learners can personalize learning experiences acc ording to their strengths and limitations, leading to maximum results. The availability of numer ous online resources provides students with ample opportunities for independent learning (Wang & Apple, 2023). Since educators are encouraged to steer away from traditional teaching methods and prioritize approaches in line with the 21st-century learning paradigm (Hockly, 20 22), it will be significant to figure out ESL teachers' perspectives on the use of digital tools in E nglish language classrooms. As highlighted by Galvis and Carvajal (2022), students' reception in classrooms depends on teaching quality. Ultimately, teachers should leverage their expertise in technology, pedagogy, and content to facilitate learning and achieve course objectives. Teach ing the millennials requires ESL teachers to adopt more innovative approaches (Farjon, Smits & Voogt, 2019). Thus, using digital tools in ESL classrooms is likely to enhance the teaching an d learning environment. However, to effectively implement these technologies in classrooms, E SL teachers must possess necessary knowledge and accept such technologies. As teachers are t he backbones of education, it is essential to comprehend teachers' perspectives on the use of dig ital tools, as it may bring impacts to their instructional and motivational practices as well as thei r interactions with students (Demir & Akpinar, 2018). Also, there was a significant surge in the use of digital tools among teachers ever since the home-based learning (HBL) period necessitat ed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which raised an interest to assess studies done on ESL teachers' perception of using digital tools to enhance their students' language learning and knowledge de velopment. A comprehensive, systematic review of articles focusing on the use of digital tools i n English language classrooms was regarded as an effective approach in gaining a more in-dept h understanding of ESL teachers' perspectives across the globe. In view of that, this systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to explore their viewpoints on the use of digital tools, w hich include online tools, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools, and virtual and augmented r ealities, among others, in the teaching and learning of the English language (Mendelson, 2022). English teaching (ET) in higher education (HE) has dramatically transformed since the COVID-19 pandemic. The transformations include the ways of mode delivery of teaching and learning English from face-to-face (F2F) to online learning. Online learning requires digital technology (DT) devices and internet connectivity (Ngoasong, 2022) to support the ET process. The development of digital technology has improved significantly (Ahmad, 2022), and it has challenges and opportunities in the ET process in HE institutions. This becomes one of the issues for lecturers and students when delivering teaching and learning online.

Aims and Objectives of the Study This s tudy aims to identify the challenges and opportunities of using digital technology (DT) in Engli sh teaching and learning activities in HE institutions. Furthermore, the objective of this study is

to conduct a comprehensive review of the challenges and opportunities of using DT in ET in HE institutions.

The Research Questions a.Whatar e the challenges of using DT faced by the lecturers and students in teaching and learning Englis h in HE institutions? b. What are the opp ortunities for using DT for lecturers and students in teaching and learning English in HE institut ions?

Literature Review The authors comprehensively reviewed previous studies on using DT in education, particularly in E T in HE institutions, to answer these questions. Thus, this study is important in particular for so me reasons. Firstly, digital technology has transformed how people learn and communicate, but more research needs to be conducted on applying DT in HE institutions (Galvis & Carvajal, 2022). Secondly, the research on DT in HE institutions requires further investigation to identify more benefits of using technology in ET by presenting different research methodologies and va rious data collection methods. Therefore, this study aims to enhance the opportunities and reduc e the challenges of utilizing DT in the ET process. Hence, the expected outcome of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the use of DT in ET at HE institutions.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to explore the integration of digital technology (DT) in English language teaching (ET) within higher education institutions (HEIs). Qualitative data is crucial for exploring and understanding human and social phenomena, particularly in educational contexts. As Ngoasong (2022) highlights, qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data that reflects the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of individuals or groups. This methodology facilitates an in-depth understanding of the complexities associated with integrating digital technology in teaching practices, capturing the rich, contextual details of participants' experiences. According to Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2002), qualitative data often involves detailed narratives that describe interactions and social phenomena, which are essential for elucidating the multifaceted nature of digital technology integration in education.

Limitations

While this study strives to offer a comprehensive narrative review of the challenges and opportunities surrounding digital technology in English language teaching, it is important to recognize certain limitations common to qualitative research. The subjective nature of qualitative data may lead to interpretative biases, and the rapidly changing nature of digital technology means that the findings may have a limited shelf life, underscoring the necessity for continuous inquiry in this area.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to, ensuring that all referenced data was appropriately cited and that the contributions of original authors were respected. A commitment to accurately represent the narratives without distortion of the original research findings and perspectives was central to the study's ethical integrity.

Review/Empirical Studies Digital T echnology in English Teaching in HE Institutions Digital technology in education refers to utilizing digital devices with internet connectivity that lecturers and students use in teaching an d learning English. The digital devices that are mostly used are computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Lecturers and students can succeed in English teaching and learning by applying advanced digital devices and internet connectivity (Cheung, Phusavat & Yang, 2021) in variati

on to the updated sources. For example, in the online learning mode of delivery, the teaching an d learning process can be conducted from home using an internet connection and digital device s. Lecturers and students can meet via Zoom meeting, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet (Demir & Akpinar, 2018) to deliver and discuss the English lessons. DT benefits the lecturers in designing the curriculum, evaluating students' understanding of the English learnin g process, and evaluating the teaching and learning program. Not only lecturers but also govern ments and stakeholders design and develop suitable curriculum content for all levels of educatio n to achieve educational goals (Ngoasong, 2022). In addition, curriculum content, assessment, a nd evaluation become the focus of using DT in ET. So, governments and lecturers may consider the arrangement of the curriculum and materials to assist the students in comprehending the less ons provided and to be suitable to the updated technology development (Ngoasong, 2022). Usin g DT in ET can be undertaken fully online and through blended learning. In online learning, DT may assist the students in continuing their learning activities from home and enhance their kno wledge from the sources on the internet. Ngoasong (2022) also added that DT implements an in novative, independent, and collaborative learning environment that may allow students to study online. These learning activities could be set based on students' needs and be student-centered r ather than only lecturer-centered. Compared to the blended learning approach, it combines F2F and online teaching and learning activities supported by advanced technology (Lazar, 2018). T his approach has grown significantly to transform F2F learning into digitalization. The benefits of blended learning include making it easy to understand the lessons from the lecturers and bein g open to discussion when the lesson is delivered F2F. Also, blended learning may fill the gap b etween audio-visual and kinesthetic students by using stories in the digital educational format (Galvis & Carvajal, 2022).

Challenges in Using Digital Technology in English Teaching There a re many challenges the lecturers and students face in applying digital technology in English teac hing in HE institutions. The challenges are related to digital technology access, pedagogical and personal dimensions, and cultural awareness. Regarding digital technology access, applying D T is challenging on the technical side. Technically, online learning activities incorporate applyi ng technology devices supported by internet access and applications such as social media platfo rms, websites, e-mail, YouTube channels, Microsoft Teams, Zoom Meeting, and Google Meeti ng. However, practically, lecturers and students face difficulties using these applications becaus e some are not commonly used in the teaching and learning process. These applications allow le cturers to deliver their lessons by utilizing various kinds of software. The software may cause pr oblems with the various advanced technologies, which the lecturers and students need to becom e more familiar with (Galvis & Carvajal, 2022). Also, the barrier to internet connectivity may i mpact the process of ET using DT in HE institutions (Lazar, 2018). Consequently, difficulties with internet connections can lead to severe problems in online learning (Ngoasong, 2022). The next challenge is engagement. Not all students can adapt quickly to online learning (Galvis & C arvajal, 2022). For instance, some students who have difficulties understanding visual material cannot receive meaningful lessons online but should combine audio and visual material (Ngoas ong, 2022). Meanwhile, if some students have hearing issues, they will also have difficulties list ening to the audio material (Lazar, 2018). Hence, this is also a challenge in using DT in ET for s tudents with online learning.

The other challenge is the pedagogical dimension. Integrating technology and education require s pedagogical knowledge or pedagogical competence. Digital pedagogical content competence is proposed to upgrade the technological pedagogical content knowledge. Digital pedagogical c ompetencies can be defined as how digital technologies can enhance teaching or learning by co nsidering pedagogical values. Lecturers can develop their students' learning strategies to impro ve their English proficiency. For instance, using a recorded audio or video file while the meetin

g is delivered online. This method can assist the lecturers and students when referring to previou s lessons. The personal dimension is another challenge for the students and lecturers when appl ying digital technology in English teaching in HE institutions. Students face difficulties regardi ng the budget to purchase a personal laptop, smartphone, or computer and internet data to suppo rt online learning. Also, lecturers who are untrained in using digital technology for online teachi ng struggle to transfer or teach English to the students. Furthermore, these personal problems be come a challenge for online teaching and learning activities. The last challenge is cultural aware ness. Using DT in teaching and learning activities has impacted cultural awareness regarding the students' behaviour (Lazar, 2018). For instance, students' attitudes to learning from F2F to online learning are changing (Ngoasong, 2022). The lecturers can understand how students lear n in online learning and the factors behind that. Also, understanding the students' behaviour is challenging regarding their cultural awareness of English teaching and learning using DT in HE institutions. Hence, the challenges identified and explained according to the previous research a bove answered the first research question.

Opportunities in Applying Digital Technology in English Teaching and Learning in HE I nstitutions Besides the challenges, using digital technology in English teaching provides opportunities for English l ecturers and students. Firstly, it is flexibility. Flexibility can be divided into two scopes (time an d place). Online learning can provide a flexible teaching and learning process between lecturers and students. Regarding the flexibility in place, the teaching and learning process can be conduc ted from home, the office, outdoors, or indoors. In addition, lecturers may set a day and time to s chedule a meeting on the Zoom platform to transfer knowledge and discuss the lessons with the students to show flexibility in time (Ngoasong, 2022). This is more effective and efficient for le cturers and students regarding transport fees to the institutions. Additionally, the opportunity fo r using digital technology in English teaching and learning is the wide range of digital sources a vailable on websites or e-platforms. Since many applications are available, selecting the appropriate application to improve students' online learning ability is essential to enhance the b enefits of using the platforms and applications in English teaching and learning. This approach can contribute to the student's self-confidence in online learning because of the range of platfor ms and applications supporting their learning. Also, the lecturers may be more creative in desig ning the lesson plan and providing various digital sources to improve their students' English skil ls. In conclusion, previous s tudies identified some opportunities for lecturers and students to conduct online teaching and le arning. These included flexibility in time and place and a wide range of digital sources. The opportunities are not only for the students but also for the lecturers in developing their strategies for teaching English in HE institutions. So, the second research question has been answered fro m the previous studies explained about the opportunities of using DT in ET in HE institutions.

Discussion from findings Based on the results found from the narrative review, the author identifies and classifies the challenges and opportunities of using digital technology in English teaching and learning activities in HE i nstitutions. Those challenges can be reduced by providing DT training for lecturers and student s. Also, the opportunities can be optimized to increase students' English proficiency. In addition the government and stakeholders may increase the DT facilities and internet connectivity to ach ieve the best service and quality of English teaching and learning online. The challenges and op portunities that have been identified are described in Table 1.

Aspects	Challenges	Opportunities	Sources
Digital technology	*		Ngoasong, (2022)

access			
Engagement	*		Galvis & Carvajal, (2022)
Pedagogical dimensions	*		Ngoasong, (2022)
Personal dimension	*		Zhang & Wang, (2023)
Flexibility		*	Galvis & Carvajal, (2022)
Wide range of sources		*	Ngoasong, (2022)
Cultural awareness	*		Lazar, (2018)

Conclusion Many challenges and opportunities exist for using digital technology in English teaching in HE institutions. The previous studies identified some problems and benefits in digital learning, which still require further investigation. Therefore, this study conducted a comprehensive review in identifying and classifying the challenges and opportunities of using digital technology in English teaching and learning. This study provides valuable insight to the lecturers and students in integrating digital technology into the English teaching and learning process. The challenges in integrating DT into English teaching are DT access, engagement, pedagogical dimension, personal dimension, and cultural awareness. The challenges also include the digital technology training, limited access to digital devices, and internet connectivity (Ngoasong, 2022). So, these challenges impact the English teaching and learning process in HE institutions when undertaking online learning. However, many opportunities exist to integrate DT into English teaching and learning. They are flexible regarding place and time while conducting teaching and learning activities. They may attend the meeting with the lecturers from home and set the appropriate time between lecturers and students to achieve the goal of the lessons. Also, another opportunity is that a wide range of sources can be accessed online using digital technology, applications, and platforms to enhance their English skills. Then, the lecturers can access various sources to update their English knowledge. To conclude, this comprehensive review benefits lecturers and students in English teaching and learning in HE institutions by reducing the challenges and improving the opportunities for integrating DT and education.

Recommendations Based on the findings from the qualitative narrative review of the integration of digital technology in English language teaching (ET) within higher education institutions (HEIs), several actionable recommendations are proposed for educators, administrators, policymakers, and researchers. These recommendations aim to enhance the effective use of digital technologies in language education and to overcome existing challenges. 1) Investment in Technology Infrastructure: HEIs should ensure that robust technological infrastructures are in place, including reliable internet connectivity, access to necessary devices, and up-to-date software platforms. This investment is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment where technology can thrive. 2) Institutions should prioritize the development and provision of accessible digital resources (e.g., e-books, online

databases, multimedia tools) to support diverse learning needs and preferences. This inclusivity enhances engagement and learning outcomes for all students. 3) Encourage ongoing qualitative and quantitative research initiatives to continuously explore the impact of digital technology on English language teaching. 4) Establish structured mechanisms for gathering feedback from faculty and students on their experiences with digital tools in language teaching. This feedback can inform future technology integration strategies and address emerging challenges in real time. 5) HEIs should develop comprehensive policies that articulate the expectations and guidelines for using digital technologies in teaching and learning. These policies should address issues such as academic integrity, data privacy, and equitable access to technology. 6) Incorporate technology integration into the overall strategic planning of the institution. This ensures a cohesive approach where digital technology aligns with teaching goals, institutional mission, and student learning outcomes. 7) Actively involve students in discussions about technology integration in their language learning processes. Their insights can guide educators in selecting and implementing tools that align with students' needs and preferences. 8) Establish dedicated support services to assist both faculty and students in troubleshooting technological issues. Accessible technical support helps alleviate frustrations and encourages the effective use of digital tools in language learning.

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