From Barriers to Bridges:
The Impact of Technology on Language Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Various digital innovations have been used in schools across the country to support both academic and social language development for students with limited English proficiency. These programs have, in many circumstances, been considered to be a supplemental support or intervention. However, technological advancements now allow educators to implement these programs, websites, and applications within classrooms, making academic and social impacts on instruction, grading, and assessment of students in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. Technology has also simplified communication between teachers and families. Examples from the author's first year as an ESOL teacher shared in this chapter demonstrate how digital innovations can lead to meaningful, equity-oriented outcomes for language learners, their families, and classroom teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, the transformation of technology has highly impacted the business, financial, medical, and educational sectors along with the social interactions of the general public. The development of Facebook and launch of Google in 2004, followed by the release of Apple's first iPhone in 2007, initiated a technological revolution across the globe (Hammond, 2019). The numerous technological advancements and innovations in science, space, media, and various other fields have expanded the knowledge of experts, provided opportunity to make remarkable discoveries, and shaped a path of success for the future. While these domains are

vital building blocks to global society, the most significant area impacted by the advancement of technology is, undoubtedly, communication.

The progression of mobile phone technology coupled with internet accessibility was groundbreaking, and the inclusion of music, games, and other applications was a newfound experience. People were sharing their lives through phone calls, text messages, emails, music, and gaming challenges from virtually anywhere. Year after year, innovative technologies improved devices and applications, and updated versions were released regularly. Eventually, language translation applications, supported by the use of artificial intelligence (AI), allowed digitally-mediated communication to expand even further, providing people the opportunity to communicate with one another, regardless of language, in any given setting (Moneus & Sahari, 2024).

This advancement paved the way for the countless language applications used today. Translation services are available to download on most devices to interpret spoken conversations, written documents, and other scripts into a preferred language. Language learning applications, constructed from similar technology, provide evidence-based instruction to users in their native language, so they can gain proficiency in a second language While this progression and the current utilization of this technology has been beneficial to a vast number of people across nations, the effect it has had on America's English language learners, their families, and the educators who teach them is immeasurable.

As state and federal laws about the support of English language learners developed over time, the technology needed to maintain the program regulations, measure language proficiency, compile data, communicate and engage with families, and most importantly, support students' language development, transformed with them- Though schools in the United States have seen a dramatic increase in the number of multilingual learners recently, the technological innovations, designed especially for language acquisition keep coming. New language technologies continue to emerge, providing opportunities for teachers to help establish English language foundations for non-English speakers (Kai & Hua, 2021).

Effectively implementing these technologies can make a massive difference in the language acquisition and academic outcomes of a language learner. They, of course, develop English skills, which assist in their academic achievement, but also contribute to the confidence they gain from their accomplishments which impacts their social development (Harper et al., 2021). In my experience, the connections formed between the student, the parent, and teachers during this process become bridges to learning that once were barriers from language. I am thankful for each bridge that was built this year as I learned the significance of not only technology use in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, but the vitality in those programs themselves.

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