

# DIGITAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** With the advent of technology and the advancing digital age, SLA has witnessed a profound transformation providing learners with an extensive range of tools and resources. The article describes the shift from traditional to digital learning and discusses the benefits and challenges associated with incorporating digital tools and technologies into a language learning environment. It aims to delve into the extensive research on digitalization in the context of SLA and focuses on the impact of the digital age on learning a second language exploring L2 participation in digital forms and practices. The object of the study are the approaches to FLT and the way they can be used synchronically with contemporary technology as well as the way technology use upgrades and fosters foreign language acquisition. Embracing technology in language learning enhances accessibility, flexibility, interactivity, and personalization benefiting learners from various backgrounds. Digital platforms provide interactive exercises, gamified quizzes, and real-time feedback allowing learners to practice in a dynamic and engaging manner. Such tools promote self-directed learning supporting learners in second language acquisition. Balancing technology integration with traditional teaching methods is essential to foster comprehensive language development.

**Keywords:** *digital learning, digital competence, digital literacy.*

**Field:** Humanities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era has revolutionized various aspects of life including language acquisition. With the advent of technology and the advancing digital age, second language acquisition has witnessed a profound transformation providing learners with an extensive range of tools and resources. Researchers have begun exploring the benefits and challenges associated with incorporating digital tools and technologies into language learning environments. This article aims to delve into the extensive research conducted on digitalization in second language acquisition. It focuses on the impact of the digital age on learning a second language exploring the opportunities and the challenges it poses.

The object of the study are the approaches to foreign language teaching and the way they are used synchronically with contemporary technology as well as the way technology use upgrades and fosters foreign language acquisition. The study focuses on second language acquisition but in search for new ways to complement the traditional approaches in order to get more effective learning. The research questions are

- How can learners develop digital competence and create a direct link between learning resources and styles and their achievement?
- How can learners use digital technologies in second language learning?

Although people still debate on the benefits of the Internet nowadays, linguists are increasingly studying its influence on language. A lot of researchers in the field (see Chapelle and Sauro 2017, White 2017) study the technology-instruction interference on language learning including language skills, vocabulary and grammar, pragmatics and intercultural learning.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL TO DIGITAL LEARNING

The key word that distinguishes the research from the traditional learning and experiences in the classroom is 'digital'. Starting with the digital environment, Kotsanis (2018, 29) defines it as "a context, or a place, that is enabled by technology and digital devices, often transmitted over the Internet, or other digital means". Since digital technologies are fundamentally transforming economy and social life and, at the same time, are reshaping the educational system, teachers are to preparing learners for the digital world. Technology is allowing learners to experience simulated real-life scenarios and practice their language skills because language learning websites offer extensive libraries of audio and video resources that enhance listening and speaking skills. Platforms, on the other hand, provide multimedia content suitable for learners of different proficiency levels.

Digitalization is revealed as a process of connecting people, access to new knowledge and education, on the one hand, and a transition from one's competences to the opportunities of technology,

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on the other hand. The formation of digital competence is of significant importance. Digitalization has made it easier for learners to access a vast array of online language learning resources, such as interactive exercises, multimedia materials, and online dictionaries. Learners can now conveniently access these resources at any time and from anywhere, allowing for independent and self-paced learning.

Digital competence is a key factor in the digitalization of education – knowledge about what and how you can use for effective learning. The article defines and integrates digital competence as necessary in today's world of industrial revolution and refers to its prior importance as an ability to use digital technologies effectively and responsibly in various contexts, including language learning. Thus, digital competence consists of three main learning domains: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowledge (cognitive domain) consists of facts, theories, and principles through learning. Skills (psychomotor domain) are the ability to manage tasks or problem in practice and attitudes (affective domain) represent ways of thinking about potential solutions into one's idea or plan.

In the contemporary world with the dynamic and creative use of ICT in the classroom, teachers can communicate and collaborate as well as prepare and share materials effectively.

“Digital competence implies connectivity with the skills to use digital technologies that allow teaching professionals to work with modern information and communication technology, computers, software applications and databases, helping them to realize their ideas and objectives in the context of their work. It is important for education majors to have the ability to search, collect and process information and approach it critically and systematically as well as the skills to use the design tools for media information and the capacity to access, search and use Internet-based services, especially in the context of their future activities and opportunities for continuous professional qualification.” (Tsankov & Damyanov 2017, 204).

There are five main areas which overlap because some of the activities cannot be isolated. Each of these areas are further divided into competences.

Information and data literacy to search and manage the information. Information is related to four competences, which follow the principle SSS+C. Search is the ability to find digital resources and sort the irrelevant information while storage is the ability to organise and store digital material safely. The benefit from self-service solutions online and critical evaluation of digital information are also part of this main area. Communication and collaboration imply the ability to interact and participate in virtual teams and share the information. Active participation and collaboration, social awareness and media choice are the competences in the area of communication. Digital content production is the ability to use technology to create and copyright. The area consists of production and sharing together with digital exploration of new digital opportunities. Safety of personal data, health and environment and attention to legal rights. In this context safety is related to knowledge about laws and licenses for digital behavior. Problem solving to identify and solve technical problems.

Digital competence and digital literacy are two terms that are closely interrelated. While digital competence expresses the skills necessary in the digital age, digital literacy is described as the ability to manage and integrate information, technology, and media (Paynton 2012).

Figure 1. Meaning of 'digital literacy'



Source: How to develop digital literacy skills <https://zorgle.co.uk/how-to-develop-digital-literacy-skills/>

'Digital literacy' was introduced by Gilster (1997, 1) as "the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers". Digital literacy originates together with 'media literacy' and 'computer literacy' as a concept and relates to the functional use of technology and skills. Digital literacy means having the skills you need in the contemporary world where communication and access to information is established through digital technologies.

### 3. BENEFITS OF DIGITAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Nowadays technology can inspire and motivate learners to practise their language skills, collaborate and work creatively.

The digital age has ushered in several advantages for second language acquisition:

1. Accessibility – digitalization enables learners to access a variety of resources and authentic materials, such as videos, podcasts, and articles, enhancing their exposure to real-life language usage.

2. Flexibility – digital materials can be used any time from anywhere making it convenient for individuals with busy schedules. An advantage of learning online is that the lesson can be recorded. There are four approaches, which demonstrate that flexibility as a characteristic feature of learning in the digital environment fosters self-direction, motivation, and engagement.

**Online collaborative learning** is an approach which gives students the opportunity to learn through online discussions. The instructor is a facilitator who encourages collaborative problem-solving while students brainstorm, compare, analyze and synthesize their ideas in a collaborative group context. Using discussions to drive interest and engagement is an important learning strategy.

**Connectivism** is an approach that is based on forming connections between previous knowledge and new knowledge. It relies on students to be aware of the gaps in their knowledge and address them. This is an independent self-motivating learning style because students connect knowledge and ideas, seek understanding via the internet or other resources and connect and share knowledge with other students via technology.

**Cybergogy** is an approach that helps students learn effectively in a digital environment (Wang et al. 2006). Learners construct and internalize knowledge, then sustain it through a social process. In this approach knowledge and social interaction are inseparable and lead to enhanced collaboration and increased learning outcomes.

**Heutagogy** is another self-directed learning approach but it gives students the chance to determine what they learn. Studies are pursued due to interest and needs. The educator is more of a coach and encourages students to pursue and excel in topics they are passionate about.

3. Interactivity – digital language learning provides opportunities for learners to practise their communication skills. Interactive digital tools, language learning apps and platforms increase learners' engagement in the lesson.

Teacher can work with the whole class or can send students to different breakout rooms quickly and easily; the significant point is that she should organize well how long the activities will be and transitions will take as well as how she is going to interact with and give feedback to students.

4. Personalization – online platforms incorporate learning technologies that adapt to individual learner preferences and tailor lessons to the learners' needs catering to different proficiency levels and learning styles providing immediate feedback on exercises and assessments. Adaptive learning algorithms analyze learners' progress and provide customized feedback for improvement. Digital tools provide the opportunity for individualized learning experiences, allowing learners to focus on their specific language needs and progress at their own pace.

### 4. DIGITAL PEDAGOGY

Teachers face the challenge of refining teaching and learning techniques to keep up with the increasing demands of students. Nowadays students make the transition between their real and digital lives using technology. Digital pedagogy is the teachers' attempt to change the teaching and learning experiences of students through the use of technology.

The question that arises is Why do we need a digital pedagogy?

The answer derives from the challenges of the modern world and it is for social and pedagogical imperatives. This approach complements previous educational approaches from the field of communication and media science. After the emergence of the global digital network, it has become a vital part of the learning process. Nowadays teachers can take their lectures apart, turn content into assignments and self-study units and find ways to facilitate group work and communicate with students. Upon reflection, compared to the face-to-face groups, teachers seem to have much closer connections to the technology group because students tended to contact teachers very often and started to share the joy and the fun and the obstacles they met, the boredom they felt. But technology enables authentic conversations and this is an advantage.

Teachers have four roles in the age of technology – lecturers, passing knowledge, concepts, and theories, explaining and thinking critically; trainers when students apply these theories into practical

examples; facilitators when help students repeat and drill skills, through directing their discussions, and personal coaches in that teachers look where students stand and what they need in their personalized learning. Technology assists in that. Teachers can video record the lesson and put it online. They can offer gaming simulations to create drill exercises. Thus, technology can and will totally disrupt the teaching pattern. Teachers have become less lecturers but more of facilitators.

Teaching methods can vary according to different criteria such as objectives, subject area, philosophy, and classroom demographics (Psoinos 2021). These include PPTs, online whiteboard, live online classes, pre-recorded videos, flipped classroom, game-based teaching, and class blog.

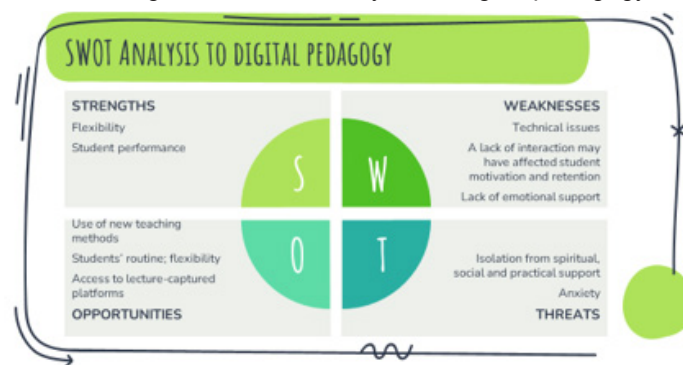
Virtual classrooms and video conferencing tools have facilitated online language lessons connecting teachers and learners beyond geographical boundaries. This increased access can significantly enhance learners' motivation by offering engaging and personalized learning experiences.

Online assessment tools enable teachers to evaluate learners' progress effectively and provide feedback.

Language learning applications offer gamified learning experiences motivating learners to acquire language skills through interactive challenges and rewards.

Successful digital learning can be achieved when learners actively participate in online language communities and forums. For this reason, diverse digital platforms should be utilized to maximize exposure to the target language and multimedia resources should be employed to develop all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Besides Google Classroom, Shkolo, Moodle, TED Talks, and Kahoot, there is a variety of digital tools, apps, and platforms that can foster language acquisition.

Figure 2. SWOT analysis to Digital pedagogy



Source: SWOT analysis is prepared for the purposes of this study

## 5. CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Digital learning provides challenges as well with motivating and engaging students in an online classroom. The aim is encourage them to participate in lessons. The lack of human interaction, however, because of the overreliance on technology may hinder face-to-face interactions and impede the development of oral communication skills. On the other hand, distractions on electronic devices may decrease learners' concentration during language learning sessions or the abundance of online resources can be a trap for learners because of the quality and accuracy of content to avoid misinformation and ineffective learning experiences.

## 6. INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO LANGUAGE TEACHING. GAMIFICATION AND QR CODE

Technology is constantly being integrated into the teaching methods, creating a blended learning environment. Language teachers have also embraced the digital age to enhance their teaching methods. It is often suggested that the stress of education digitalization is reduced through gamification tools. Gamification can involve both the use of special computer games with educational content and the use of available free game applications for the educational process gamification. For example, a certain level can be a reward for achieving a certain level of success. The learning process can utilize the character development pattern of a role-playing game (Nurhayati et al. 2023; Poole and Clarke-Midura 2020) as gamification affects effectively learners of all ages.

For example, the educational goal of I-FLEG, a game for SLA in a virtual environment, is to foster

SLA. It conveys linguistic knowledge to the learners making decisions in a reality-like environment.

In order to promote user-system interaction, to elicit the learner use of the L2 in context and to maintain their attention, I-FLEG exploits the following game techniques: free exploration of the environment; items gathering; point-and-click interaction with objects, and scoring mechanism.

Another way to integrate technology in the classroom is through the use of QR codes. Learners can submit homework, access schedules, or just view class materials. Creating QR codes allows teachers to quickly share different types of data, either creating their own learning materials and link them to QR codes or converting written materials to videos. The QR code below gives guidelines on 'Using QR Codes in the Classroom to Enhance Learning' (Boschen 2016):



Source: QR code is created for the purposes of this study

Cultural differences also influence language learning in the digital age. A study on the language that has originated and developed with the immersion of technologies and their application for language learning discusses the changes it undergoes. Language change results in different use of emoticons. Comparing the use of emoticons, in his cross-cultural analysis, Kavanagh (2010) found that the frequency of their use correlates with the high-low context distinction. Japanese as a high-context culture, for example, relies more on emoticons than the USA, a representative of a low-context culture because of the wide diversity of cultures within the United States.

"Nowadays social media and ICT inevitably remove the use of facial expressions, gestures, volume, pitch, and intonation of voice. This is where emoticons step in to make communication easier, more effective, and more expressive. One's feelings can be expressed by a single character-sized graphic only (Japanese word *e* (picture) and *moji* (character)) while onomatopoeia (*yap! ha-ha*) stimulates the sound" (Tsvetkova 2018).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Embracing technology in language learning enhances accessibility, flexibility, interactivity, and personalization benefiting learners from various backgrounds. Digital platforms provide interactive exercises, gamified quizzes, and real-time feedback allowing learners to practice in a dynamic and engaging manner. Such tools promote self-directed learning supporting learners in second language acquisition. However, certain challenges, such as reduced face-to-face interaction and potential distractions, must be acknowledged and managed effectively for optimal language learning outcomes. As technology continues to advance, it is essential to strike a balance between digital tools and resources and traditional teaching methods in second language acquisition. With the right approach the digital age can serve as a catalyst for language proficiency in an increasingly interconnected world. Balancing technology integration with traditional teaching methods is essential to foster comprehensive language development.

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