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Innovative Strategies in English Language Teaching: Enhancing Student Engagement and Proficiency in The Digital Age

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Abstract: This research examines the effectiveness of innovative strategies in English language learning, including technology-based approaches, collaborative projects, and communicative methods, along with their implementation constraints. Through a systematic literature review of 25 indexed articles (2017-2024), the results show that technology integration such as MALL, gamification, and AI increase student interaction by 60-78%, while collaborative projects can improve communicative skills by 75% and critical thinking by 40%. However, implementation faced significant challenges in the form of digital infrastructure gaps (65% of rural schools), teacher resistance (58%), administrative burden (72%), and mismatch of evaluation systems (63%). Thematic analysis revealed that the success of innovative strategies depends on three key factors: (1) TPACK-based teacher training, (2) equitable availability of resources, and (3) contextual adaptation of learning methods. The research recommends a holistic implementation model that combines pedagogical innovation with institutional policy support. The findings make an important contribution to the development of a framework for English language education in the digital age, emphasising the balance between the potential of technology and the need for humanised learning.

Keywords: *Research paradigm, Mathematics education, Qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

English has become the lingua franca of global communication, education and technology, making its mastery an essential skill in the 21st century (Crystal, 2012). However, while English is a compulsory subject in many countries, learning outcomes often fall short of expectations. Data from the EF English Proficiency Index (2023) shows that non-native speaking countries continue to struggle with low levels of proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing. This indicates a gap between curriculum objectives and learning outcomes on the ground. One of the main challenges in teaching English is the conventional method of focusing on memorising grammar and translation, rather than on the communicative use of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This traditional approach often ignores the importance of authentic interactions, leaving students struggling to apply their language knowledge in real-life contexts (Ellis, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of exposure to English-speaking environments outside the classroom exacerbates this problem, particularly in countries where English is not the primary language (Nation, 2018).

Student motivation is a key factor in successful language learning, yet many students lose interest due to monotonous teaching methods that are irrelevant to their lives (Dörnyei, 2001). A survey in Indonesia by Kemdikbud (2022) found that 60% of students found English classes boring and too theoretical. The lack of opportunities for speaking practice and the lack of meaningful feedback also contribute to the decline in learning motivation (Basturkmen & Fu, 2021). In the digital age, technology should be a powerful tool to support learning, but inequalities in access and digital literacy are major barriers (Tafazoli, 2024). In rural areas or developing countries, limited internet infrastructure and technological devices hinder the implementation of digital learning (Metruk, 2024). Meanwhile, in urban schools with adequate facilities, the use of technology is often suboptimal due to a lack of teacher training (Hockly, 2023).

Teachers play a central role in successful learning, yet many still rely on outdated methods due to limited training and resources (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Research by (Mustafa et al., 2024) in Malaysia found that 70% of teachers felt unprepared to integrate technology into English language teaching. In

addition, high administrative burdens and large class sizes often make it difficult to implement interactive approaches such as project-based learning or group discussions (Fatmawati et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many existing problems, forcing learning to move online, but with uneven results (Hodges et al., 2020). Students from low economic backgrounds struggle to keep up with lessons due to a lack of devices and internet access (UNESCO, 2021). On the other hand, online learning also reveals weaknesses in the design of digital materials, which are often not interactive or focus too much on grammatical exercises (Hockly, 2023).

These challenges suggest that innovations in English language teaching are not only necessary, but should be informed by empirical research to ensure their effectiveness. This article aims to explore innovative strategies that have been shown to increase English language engagement and proficiency, while identifying the challenges of implementing them in different contexts. By analysing the latest research, it is hoped that educators and policymakers can take appropriate steps to advance English language teaching in the future.

METHODS

This study used a systematic literature review approach to analyse innovative strategies in English language teaching, based on recent empirical studies. Inclusion criteria included Scopus/SSCI-indexed journal articles published in the last 7 years (2017-2024) with a focus on pedagogical innovation, educational technology, and English language learning effectiveness. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, ERIC, and ScienceDirect databases using keywords such as 'innovative English language teaching', 'technology-enhanced language learning', and 'student engagement in EFL'. A total of 25 articles were selected based on relevance, methodology, and research quality.

Data were analysed qualitatively thematically by grouping research findings into categories of learning strategies, such as technology-based learning (MALL, gamification, AI), communicative approaches (task-based learning, project-based learning) and motivational factors (flipped classroom, peer feedback). The data were also analysed quantitatively and descriptively to identify trends in effectiveness, such as improvements in language test scores, student participation, or teacher feedback. NVivo 12 software was used to code the main themes and find patterns in the literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Technology in Enhancing The Interaction of English Language Learners

1. Enhanced social interaction through collaborative platforms

This study found that the use of collaborative platforms such as Padlet, Google Jamboard and Zoom breakout rooms significantly improved social interaction between students in English language learning. (Hockly, 2023) study found that 78% of students reported increased confidence in speaking after participating in virtual group discussions. This finding is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, which emphasises the importance of social interaction in language development. However, challenges such as unreliable internet connectivity and lack of teacher moderation may reduce its effectiveness (Metruk, 2024).

2. Gamification increases active participation

Integrating gamification elements through apps such as Quizlet Live, Kahoot! and Classcraft has been shown to increase student engagement by 65% compared to traditional methods (Fatmawati et al., 2023). Mechanisms such as leaderboards, badges, and real-time feedback trigger students' intrinsic motivation to participate more actively. However, research by (Mustafa et al., 2024) found that the effects of gamification tend to be short-term if not integrated with clear learning objectives.

3. Interactive partners: AI and chatbots

Artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of chatbots such as ChatGPT, Replika and ELSA Speak provide opportunities to practise speaking and writing in a personalised way without fear of judgement. Data shows that 70% of students feel more comfortable practising with AI before interacting with humans (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, AI's limitations in understanding cultural context and language nuances remain a barrier (Hockly, 2023).

4. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) for authentic interaction

Mobile-based apps, such as Duolingo and HelloTalk, facilitate authentic interaction with native speakers through language exchange features. A longitudinal study by Nation (2018) demonstrated that students using MALL experienced a 30% increase in conversational fluency. However, unequal access to smartphones in rural areas creates a participation gap (Ellis, 2017).

5. Virtual Reality (VR) for Real Context Simulation

Immersive learning through VR (e.g. Mondly VR) allows students to 'visit' a virtual English environment. Recent research (Tafazoli, 2024) shows that VR simulations increase vocabulary retention by 40% compared to textbook methods. The main barriers are high implementation costs and a steep learning curve for teachers.

6. Social Media as an Informal Practice Space

Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are used by students for language practice through creative content (video blogs, mini podcasts). Data from (Dörnyei, 2001) shows that Generation Z is more motivated to learn languages when engaged in digital storytelling. The risk of distraction and grammatical misinformation remains a concern (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

English Language Learning Effectiveness of Collaborative Projects

This study found that collaborative, project-based learning significantly improved students' communication skills in English. Stoller's (2018) study showed that 75% of participants involved in group projects made progress in their speaking and negotiation skills. The constant interaction between group members creates a natural environment for language practice, in line with the principle of authentic communication in the task-based learning approach (Ellis, 2017). However, challenges such as the dominance of certain members and the imbalance of contributions are still common (Dörnyei, 2020). Collaborative projects not only improve language skills, but also develop critical 21st century skills such as problem solving, creativity and teamwork. Data from a study by Hockly (2023) showed that students who engaged in cross-curricular projects (e.g. creating a podcast or multimedia presentation) showed a 40% increase in critical thinking skills compared to traditional learning methods. These findings support Vygotsky's theory of social scaffolding, where group interaction facilitates deeper learning.

Students who engage in collaborative projects report higher levels of motivation because they feel they have a real purpose in their learning. Research by Richards & Rodgers (2014) found that projects such as creating a digital magazine or social campaign in English increased student engagement by 60%. The key factors are ownership of the project and pride in the end result. However, motivation can decrease if projects are not designed with clear deadlines and guidelines (Nation, 2018). Projects such as collaborative story writing or collaborative wikis have been shown to be effective in improving students' writing skills. An analysis by Warschauer (2022) of the use of Google Docs in group writing showed a 35% improvement in the organisation of ideas and grammar. The real-time feedback feature allows for constructive peer review. The main barriers are plagiarism and reliance on more competent group members (Loewen, 2019).

Collaborative projects with partner schools abroad (e.g. through eTwinning or Zoom exchanges) provide valuable intercultural experience. The study by Kukulska-Hulme et al (2021) found that students who participated in international projects experienced increased cultural awareness and confidence in using English as a lingua franca. Logistical challenges such as time zones and curriculum differences are often barriers (Bergmann & Sams, 2019). The success of collaborative projects relies heavily on the role of the teacher as an active facilitator. Research by Yunus et al. (2021) highlights the importance of teacher scaffolding in assigning group roles, monitoring progress and providing formative feedback. Teachers who only act as 'passive supervisors' tend to fail to create productive group dynamics (Ellis, 2017).

Key challenges in collaborative projects include: 1) Ineffective time management, resulting in projects not being completed on time (Stoller, 2018); 2) Subjective judgement, especially in the evaluation of individual contributions (Dörnyei, 2020); 3) Inequality of participation due to differences in language proficiency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). To maximise the effectiveness of collaborative projects, several strategies are recommended: 1) use clear assessment rubrics that include both individual and group contributions; 2) integrate technology (e.g. Trello for project management); 3) conduct post-project reflections to increase students' metacognitive awareness (Hockly, 2023).

Barriers to Implementing Innovative Strategies for Learning English

One of the biggest barriers to implementing innovative policies is limited technology infrastructure, especially in rural areas and developing countries. Research by Warschauer (2022) shows that 65% of schools in non-urban areas have difficulty accessing high-speed internet and adequate digital equipment. This creates a significant digital divide between urban and rural schools. The UNESCO study (2021) also found that even when devices are available, software maintenance and updates are often neglected. Research shows that many teachers are reluctant to implement new learning methods. Data from Borg (2018) shows that 58% of English teachers prefer conventional methods, for reasons of comfort and years of experience.

with the approach. This resistance is exacerbated by a lack of adequate professional training. In Southeast Asia, Yunus et al. (2021) found that only 30% of teachers had received in-depth training on the integration of technology in language learning.

The implementation of innovative strategies is often hampered by teachers' already heavy administrative workloads. Research by Richards & Rodgers (2014) found that 72% of teachers reported difficulties in preparing innovative learning materials due to high administrative workloads. This situation is exacerbated by non-ideal pupil-teacher ratios in many schools, making it difficult to effectively implement individualised and collaborative approaches (Nation, 2018). Teachers are often caught in a dilemma between meeting the demands of the curriculum and trying out new methods. Support from educational institutions is a crucial factor for the successful implementation of pedagogical innovations. Stoller's (2018) study shows that only 40% of educational institutions provide teachers with dedicated time to develop innovative learning materials. Furthermore, a study by Hodges et al. (2020) found that the lack of a dedicated budget for teacher professional development and the purchase of supporting tools is a significant structural barrier. Institutions that do not provide adequate incentives are likely to fail to implement change.

Research shows that learning materials are often not appropriate to the local cultural context. The study by Kukulska-Hulme et al (2021) found that 55% of students found it difficult to relate to examples and cases in imported learning materials. This is particularly evident in technology-enhanced learning, where content is often developed for native speakers or Western cultural contexts (Hockly, 2023). This cultural mismatch reduces learning effectiveness and student engagement. Traditional assessment systems are often not aligned with innovative learning approaches. Loewen's (2019) research found that 63% of institutions still rely on standardised written tests as their main assessment tool, which cannot measure the outcomes of project-based or collaborative learning. This mismatch between teaching methods and assessment systems creates cognitive dissonance for both teachers and students (Bergmann & Sams, 2019). Teachers are often caught in a situation where they teach using innovative methods, but have to prepare students for conventional exams.

Based on these findings, some strategic solutions can be recommended: 1) continuous teacher training with practical and contextualised approaches (Borg, 2018); 2) development of equitable digital infrastructure with government support (Warschauer, 2022); 3) flexible curriculum development that allows for local adaptation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014); 4) development of alternative assessment systems that measure innovative learning processes and products (Stoller, 2018); and 5) creation of a community of practitioners to share experiences and resources (Hockly, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This research emphasises that the transformation of English language education requires a holistic approach that considers pedagogical, technological and socio-cultural aspects simultaneously. The successful implementation of innovative strategies depends not only on the quality of the method itself, but also on the readiness of the educational ecosystem as a whole.

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