

The Teaching and Learning of English language in
the Digital Transformation Era

Dr. Aly Abdul Samea Qoura
Professor of ELT, Mansoura University

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This paper aims at elaborating the interactive relationship between EFL/ESL teachers and learners and computer and technologies. It focuses on how teachers and learners have been coping with the ICT age's repercussions. In other words, it sheds more light on the trend of digital transformation that has spread through the processes and environment of education in general and EFL/ESL education in particular.

At its simplest level, *digital transformation* means transforming an organization's core business to better meet customer needs by leveraging technology and data. In education, that target customer is often students, though it could also be faculty, staff, alumni, and others. As an example, a digital transformation aimed at transforming the student experience might include items such as student recruiting, registration, provision of a variety of online learning options, working with faculty and programs to convert courses to flipped and blended models, monitoring and assessment of learning. Digital technology in the modern world is not only a tool, but also a living environment that opens up new opportunities: learning at any convenient time, continuing education, etc. This article aims to describe the specificity of digital education, the current state of its implementation, the expected results and concerns in this respect. Four sections in this paper include teaching, learning, assessment, and promises and challenges of the digital transformation era.

* Professor of ELT, Mansoura University

Technology tools are provided for the teaching/learning/assessment trio.

Until recently, progress toward this kind of transformation has been slow in the education sector, with inconsistent practices, tight budgets, and lack of a unified plan among the most glaring reasons for the delay. However, 5 technology trends in education to watch for are Internet of Things (IoT), Augmented reality (AR), Cyber security, Personalized learning and Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data.

In the digital age, some teachers might be reluctant to change because they feel they are immigrants in the digital world (Prensky, 2001). Change can be accompanied by fear, and thus some teachers might resist changing (Fullan, 2006). In a developing country like Egypt, teachers might feel more frustrated because of the digital gap in the country and because of the digital gap with the students. Thus, some teachers fear the use of technology because they see themselves as digital immigrants, whereas their students are digital natives (Rosen 2010).

As Guemide, Benchaiba, & Bouzar (2012) explain, e-Educators in developing countries are frustrated with two types of digital divide: the digital divide between developed and developing countries, and the digital divide between students and teachers. Labas and El Shaban (2014) added that there is a tension between two mindsets within the framework of the digital rise. The first mindset, called Mindset 1, assumes the digital revolution is just an extension of the industrial revolution. On the other hand, Mindset 2 assumes the world is now totally different from the way it was 30 years ago in terms of thinking and doing. Teachers with Mindset 1 believe there is no urgent need for a change of the educational model and they resist change. Teachers might think they do not need to change, as they succeeded without the digital tools the introduction and development of the Internet, by and large, have

had considerable implications for foreign or second language instruction. Numerous resources on the World Wide Web (WWW) offer language teachers convenience and support in language teaching and learning, (i.e., English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) instruction). It is no wonder that more and more language teachers have integrated the Internet into the classroom during the last 10 years.

The digital transformation era has provided the EFL/ESL teacher with many tools to scaffold his teaching and assessment.

Tools for helping EFL Teaching and Learning in the digital transformation era

In order for teachers to use the skills and competencies effectively in their in-and-out of the EFL classroom they need a plethora of tools and resources. Boyle (2013) and Ashutosh (2018) provided additional tools for helping educate and develop EFL teachers. Examples of these tools are:

- SpeechPeek is an online portal that allows ESL/EFL teachers to create interactive speaking and listening exercises for students to complete and submit remotely.
- BusyTeacher is an extensive repository of affordable e-books, downloadable classroom posters, informative education articles for ESL/EFL teachers and over 10,000 free printable worksheets in dozens of categories.
- English Listening Lesson Library Online (ELLLO) contains hundreds of pre-recorded monologues and discussions on an enormous variety of topics, geared to English speakers at six distinct levels of skill from beginner to advanced. ELLLO recruits speakers from more than 60 countries, helping you introduce your students to a variety of different materials.
- TEFLnet presents its materials for ESL/EFL teachers in the U.S. and internationally. Features include a worksheet

generator, downloadable lesson plans, and a discussion board for teachers.

- FunEnglishGames.com is a great resource for ESL/EFL teachers in early childhood education, offering a wide variety of teaching tools aimed at children. Features include a long list online interactive games and printable puzzles, quizzes and worksheets on numerous topics.
- Tefltunes uses the principle that music is a great teaching tool and memory aid educators in the ESL/EFL field instruct students on English grammar and topical vocabulary at multiple skill levels.
- Edmodo is an educational tool that connects teachers and students, and is assimilated into a social network. In this one, teachers can create online collaborative groups, administer and provide educational materials, measure student performance, and communicate with parents, among other functions.
- Storyboard aims to promote writing and reading skills in students through storytelling. In this tool, teachers can create interactive and artistic books online through a simple and easy to use interface. The stories created can be embedded in blogs, sent by email, and printed.
- Explain Everything is all about interaction in a virtual environment that allows students and teachers to collaborate on an interactive whiteboard activities. This software can also be integrated with Schoolwork, Dropbox, Evernote, GDrive, OneDrive and more useful apps. With the drag-and-drop options, Explain Everything is super easy and intuitive.
- Schoology is a learning management system which is free to use and it allows teachers to create and distribute materials, give assessments, track progress, etc

EFL/ESL learners in the digital transformaiton era.

With the advent of the digital transformation Berk (2016) notes that when it comes to technological tools facilitating learning for language learning, tools like: Prezi, Screencast-o-Matic, Voice Thread, Captivate, PowerPoint, Camtasia, and YouTube fall under the category of flipped learning. , Social media tools Twitter for instance caters few very helpful learning platforms such as: CambridgeWords, English247, BBCle, EnglishTips4U, LearnEnglish_BC. Apart from this INSTAGRAM has boomed with a novel concept of learning through visual aids and PINTEREST also follows the pied piper lead. Many instructors also consider creating a FACEBOOK page that their pupils can 'like'. They post updates in different languages encouraging non-native speakers to translate them. Moreover blogging on TUMBLR may also be used as an inspirational technique that motivates learners to submit their precise views and ideas in English.

There is a list of apps offered by iOS such as: Nearpod, Coursmos, Notability, PlanBook Touch, Evernote. All of them are some amazing mini digital forums that help non-native speakers learn English without facing problems. These foster improved communication skills, help them get better jobs, give lessons confidently, and above all get good grades. For android the best options are: Busuu, Fluent English, Listen & Speak, EnglishPodcast for Learners.

Al Sied and Al Pathan, (2013) and Young (2016) showed how technology can help teachers and learners to master the four language skills:

1- Computer technology and listening comprehension skill

The use of computer as a listening tool is claimed to be one of the more important learning tools for enhancing EFL students' listening skill. It allows students to learn independently and to receive immediate feedback upon the completion of tasks. Teaching and learning of listening using various media embedded in

computer can enrich the skill and help in producing better results. The use of computer also gives students the opportunity to enhance language learning by bringing in the real world. Digitized speech and video, offered by the use of computer, can also be highly effective for developing this important language skill.

2- Computer technology and speaking skill

The use of computer technology, with internet, can also be helpful for learning, improving, practicing and assessing speaking skill. EFL learners can use computer, tablets and Smartphones, connecting with internet, to chat and talk with native speakers and practice and improve their language, in friendlier foreign language learning environment. Today many social networking sites like Skype, Nimbuzz, Yahoo and Facebook etc. allow this kind of audio as well video talk, in addition to IM (instant messaging) service. Payne and Whitney (2002) and (Al Sied and Al Pathan,2013) assure that such use of computer technology also gets even the reluctant EFL learners to speak.

3- Computer technology and reading comprehension skill

Using computers, with the use of internet provides a variety of current and authentic reading materials compared to potentially outdated reading material sourced from textbooks (Kasper, 2000). Chun and Plass (1996) stress that the verbal and visual systems in computer programs help students to better understand the text. Most of the CALL programs are filled with graphics and voices and when EFL learners visualize the situation, they can remember the subject better in the long term.

The varieties of reading materials, available with the use of computer technology and internet can encourage EFL learners and open opportunities to read widely in foreign language like English. That is why it is argued that computers can promote extensive reading; build reading fluency and rate; develop intrinsic motivation for reading; and contribute to a coherent curriculum for student learning.

4- Computer technology and writing skill

Young (2016) believes that digital technologies change print-based concepts of text, reader and require new literacy strategies. Digital texts both imitate and expand existing print forms. Some digital texts share common forms and common purposes: the online newspaper, for example, is similar in many ways to its print-based counterpart. At the same time, digital texts possess characteristics that are unique to the digital medium, challenging our ideas about what texts are and how they work. More specifically, digital texts may be hypertextual and multimodal, linking to a multitude of other texts; they are dynamic, changing content in real time. Also, they are indeterminate, with no definite beginning or end, and multimodal, incorporating visual, auditory, and other non-verbal elements. New digital genres, such as web pages, web logs, multi-user virtual environments like MOOs and MUDs, and collaborative writing platforms like wikis and threaded discussions are evolving and new digital grammars emerge with each new form.

The composing process yields a variety of legitimate and effective products, outcomes, and artifacts that go beyond the printed page, including hypertext, hypermedia, web design, digital literacy portfolios, PowerPoint presentations, and digital video documents.

Using multimodal literacies and multimedia technologies for example, has the potential to make the composing process and the subsequent texts produced more dynamic, interactive, generative, exploratory, visual, and collaborative.

Implications:

Technology should not replace the writing teacher; however, teachers will need to embrace new and emerging technologies with respect to teaching composition and coaching students' development of effective writing processes and products.

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Digital-Assessment

Digital-Assessment, which is also known as technology-enhanced assessment, E- assessment or online assessment, is the continuous electronic assessment process where information and communication technology is used for the presentation of assessment activity, and the recording of responses. Digital-Assessment is an emerging concept which offers both teachers and students new possibilities for interacting in an immersive and responsive educational environment, moving beyond the static environment of the traditional pen and paper approach.

Chignecto Central Region School Board (2013) provided the following differences between assessment types: **Assessment for Learning** (formative assessment) . . . occurs during teaching and learning and is used to inform teachers and students of what has been learned and to provide direction for instruction and student improvement. **Assessment as Learning** . . . is a critical part of Assessment for Learning where teachers include students in the assessment process through a gradual release of responsibility, beginning with explicit instruction and moving towards independence. Students will, over time, develop their capacity to be independent, autonomous learners who are able to set individual goals, monitor their own progress, determine next steps, and reflect on their learning. **Assessment of Learning** (summative assessment) . . . provides evidence of student achievement at specific times throughout the grade/course/program, often at the end of a period of learning. Assessment of learning captures learning to date at a specific point in time.

Why Are Digital Assessment Better Than Paper Testing?

There are lots of reasons to use educational technologies for student assessments, such as saving time, making the learning process more comprehensive and friendly, offering fast feedback, etc. For example, the Unicheck Plagiarism Checker Add-on for Google Docs allows students to not just avoid accidental or intentional plagiarizing, but also check their citations and references. The students can pre check their assignments before submitting them, which saves their teachers' time for the actual grading. Also, no more stacks of papers on the table, no more lost tests, no more need of taking all assignments home.

Digital assessment tools ease the lives of both teachers and learners: Due to modern technologies, students can get answers to their questions without needing to interrupt each other. All their activity can be tracked by a teacher on the spot. Finally, digital testing is fun for students, which creates a better learning environment: Working with an interested audience makes teaching easier and more desirable for learners.

Four Ways of Using Digital Assessment Tools

1. Gamifying the Answers

One of the most popular tools for digital assessments is Kahoot! This gamification platform helps teachers build the learning process in a form of a game by creating multiple choice questions or using already existing games. The teacher can upload media files and images to create a unique game, or download ready-made stuff.

2. Giving Instant Feedback

A great tool for free stuff lovers is Socrative. This software is equipped with various features that can be used by educators for many different purposes. It also includes activities like quizzes, quick questions, exit tickets, etc. Socrative has an intuitive colorful and easy interface and apps for both students and teachers.

3. Tracking Progress

Plickers is another real-time educational software allowing to get data for an assessment. It is a comprehensive tool that helps teachers understand exactly where their students are in terms of progress. Though Plickers is a serious tool for digital assessing, many students consider it to be a fun game, what makes the studying process even easier.

4. Creating Survey-Based Assessments

A widely-used tool for student assessments is Google Forms that allows teachers to create multiple choice questions in the form of a survey and enhance it with images and videos in a few minutes. They can also add collaborators to their Google Forms and work on a survey together.

Dyer (2019) and Lynch (2017) and Watanabe-Crockett (2018) provided a long list of these tools and apps for formative assessment:

- Edueto is a site where teachers can create a variety of online exercises.
- Edulastic – Allows teachers to create standards-aligned assessments quickly and get instant feedback from students to adjust learning.
- Flipgrid Ask questions, spark introspective multimedia responses with outstanding tool.
- ForAllRubrics – This software is free for all teachers and allows you to import, create, and score rubrics on your iPad, tablet, or smartphone.
- Quizalize – A great tool that allows teachers to easily create quizzes and homework for students. Teachers can then see how the students did and identify areas for improvement.

Promises and challenges of the humachine era

No doubt that technology has been a significant factor in enhancing the EFL/ESL teaching and learning processes, but not

without a number of challenges. Some of the precedence of technology can be manifested in the following:

Students prefer technology because they believe that it makes learning more interesting and fun. Subjects that students deem challenging or boring can become more interesting with virtual lessons, through a video, or when using a tablet.

A study by Becta (2006) showed that 9 out of 10 students indicated that using technology in the classroom would help prepare them for the digital future.

Today's technology enables students to learn at their own pace.

Technology connects with students. It occupies an important place within students' lives. When they are not in school, just about everything that they do is connected in some way to technology.

Technology helps in making diagnosis and intervention. When student work is done online, teachers are able to receive immediate results and students to get prompt feedback. This immediacy enhances both the grading process and student learning. Teachers quickly address student misconceptions, lack of content background, or need for practice.

It increases the creativity. Any student can write, film and publish a video or an audio. Youtube and Google video are used by our students every day. They watch more videos on Youtube than they watch on T.V. or cinemas.

On the other hand there are some challenges facing the technology integration in the EFL classrooms. Peachy (2015) contends that computers are meant to have transformed the way language is taught and learned but in many classrooms expensive equipment is of little value and barriers to successful integration remain open to question.

We are now 20 years into the new millennium and technology has become a prime element of almost all English language teaching (ELT) conferences and journals around the world. Yet, when we look for real improvements in student performance and

effective use of technology by teachers, I think that the results are pretty disappointing.

Investment in technology has often been equated with investment in hardware. In many ways this is the easy fix: throw money at the challenges that technology integration poses.

Without sufficient connectivity the investment in hardware is wasted because, as soon as teachers and students start accessing content-rich websites in any numbers, the connection grinds to a halt, leaving the teacher embarrassed and reverting to traditional paper-based resources.

There is also the problem of the IT gatekeeper. Peachy, Nik (2015) made the point that very few IT support staff have any pedagogical training and they tend to see themselves as defenders of the IT infrastructure.

In addition, Mantano (2015) pointed out some other challenges:

- Technology can be a distraction.
- Possible disconnect of social interaction.
- Technology can foster more cheating in class and on assignments.

Finally, Jefferies (2020) noted that the warp-speed progress of digital transformation in education has also highlighted the need for greater support for educators when it comes to integrating new technologies into their teaching. “It’s challenging to embrace these technologies in a truly transformative way. You have to hold teachers’ hands, provide safe spaces to fail because they never had the experience of learning their subjects in today’s environment.”

Looking further ahead, intelligent tutoring systems, which aim to provide immediate and customized instruction or feedback to learners, usually without requiring intervention from a human teacher, have generated a considerable buzz in recent years.

However, Holmes et al (2019), indicate that the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the education sector has so far been generally disappointing. “The focus has always been on how to

build a tool that can teach as well as a teacher,” he says. “But the reality is you can’t, though you can build tools that give the appearance of doing that.”

As such, Holmes is far more interested in AI tools that could help teachers to become “super teachers” rather than tools that attempt to do their job for them. As he points out, any technology is ultimately only as good as the teacher who’s using it.

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