

DIGITAL LITERACY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: CHALLENGES FACED BY UZBEK EFL TEACHERS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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Annotation: *This paper explores the challenges faced by Uzbek EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in integrating digital literacy into language learning in the post-pandemic era. It investigates the obstacles related to technological infrastructure, teacher training, student engagement, and curriculum adaptation. The study highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on accelerating digital learning and discusses strategies to support teachers in effectively incorporating digital tools to enhance language education.*

Keywords: *digital literacy, language learning, EFL teachers, Uzbekistan, post-pandemic education, technological challenges, teacher training, online learning*

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically transformed educational landscapes worldwide, compelling teachers and students to adapt rapidly to online and hybrid learning environments. In Uzbekistan, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers faced unprecedented challenges in integrating digital literacy into their teaching practices. Digital literacy—the ability to effectively use digital tools and platforms—is now essential for both educators and learners to navigate the evolving educational context. However, many Uzbek EFL teachers struggle with limited access to technology, insufficient training, and difficulties engaging students remotely. This paper examines these challenges in detail and proposes practical approaches to support teachers in enhancing digital literacy integration for more effective language learning in the post-pandemic era.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the integration of digital technologies into education worldwide, profoundly impacting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Uzbekistan. While digital literacy is increasingly recognized as a crucial competence for both teachers and students, many Uzbek EFL educators face significant challenges in effectively incorporating digital tools into their language teaching practices. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing strategies that support successful digital integration and improve language learning outcomes.

One of the primary challenges is the limited technological infrastructure in many educational institutions across Uzbekistan. While urban schools and universities may have better access to computers, high-speed internet, and digital learning platforms, rural and remote areas often struggle with inadequate hardware, unstable internet

connections, and lack of technical support. These infrastructural disparities create unequal opportunities for teachers and learners, limiting the reach and effectiveness of digital language education.

Another major obstacle is the insufficient digital literacy and technical skills among many EFL teachers. The sudden shift to online or hybrid teaching during the pandemic exposed gaps in teachers' preparedness to use digital platforms, tools, and resources effectively. Many educators lacked prior experience with virtual classrooms, video conferencing software, and digital assessment methods, which hindered their ability to design engaging and interactive lessons. Furthermore, continuous professional development opportunities related to digital skills remain limited, exacerbating the problem.

Student engagement poses another significant concern in digitally mediated language learning. Online classes often face issues such as reduced interaction, distractions from non-educational content, and difficulties in monitoring student participation. For EFL learners, whose language proficiency may already pose challenges, the lack of face-to-face communication reduces opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice and immediate feedback, which are vital for language acquisition. Teachers report struggling to maintain students' motivation and active involvement in virtual settings.

Curriculum adaptation to digital formats also presents difficulties. Traditional language teaching materials and methods may not translate effectively into online environments without modification. The need to develop or source digital content that aligns with language learning objectives, is pedagogically sound, and is accessible to diverse learners is pressing. However, many teachers face time constraints and lack support in creating or adapting such resources. This gap can result in less effective instruction and missed learning opportunities.

Moreover, the digital divide extends beyond technology access to include socio-economic factors affecting students' ability to participate in online learning. Some students lack personal devices or private spaces conducive to study, further complicating their engagement with digital language education. Teachers often feel constrained by these external factors, which impact their students' performance and progression.

Cultural attitudes and resistance to change also influence the integration of digital literacy in EFL teaching. Some educators and stakeholders may hold traditional views favoring conventional classroom methods and perceive digital tools as supplementary or unnecessary. Overcoming skepticism requires awareness-raising about the benefits of digital literacy for language learning and demonstrating successful implementation examples.

Addressing these challenges demands a multi-pronged approach. Investment in technological infrastructure is fundamental, particularly in under-resourced areas, to ensure equitable access for all educators and learners. Governments and educational authorities should prioritize expanding internet coverage, providing necessary hardware, and offering technical support services.

Professional development is equally critical. Comprehensive training programs focusing on digital literacy, pedagogical integration of technology, and online classroom management can empower EFL teachers to utilize digital tools confidently and creatively. Such programs should be ongoing and adaptive to emerging technologies and teaching contexts.

To enhance student engagement, teachers can employ interactive digital platforms and multimedia resources that encourage participation and collaboration. Incorporating synchronous and asynchronous activities allows for flexibility and caters to diverse learning preferences. Feedback mechanisms and peer interaction should be integral components to support language development and motivation.

Curriculum developers and educators must collaborate to create and share high-quality digital language learning materials aligned with curriculum standards. Open educational resources (OER) and community-driven content repositories can facilitate access to diverse, adaptable materials that meet varied learner needs.

Addressing socio-economic disparities requires awareness and supportive policies, including providing students with devices or internet subsidies where possible. Alternative solutions, such as offline digital content or blended learning models, can help bridge gaps for those with limited connectivity.

Promoting a positive attitude towards digital literacy involves advocacy, showcasing success stories, and involving teachers in decision-making processes related to technology adoption. Creating communities of practice where educators share experiences, challenges, and solutions can foster a supportive environment for digital innovation.

In conclusion, while digital literacy presents tremendous opportunities for enhancing English language learning in Uzbekistan, significant challenges hinder its effective integration among EFL teachers in the post-pandemic era. Addressing infrastructural, pedagogical, socio-economic, and cultural barriers requires coordinated efforts from educational authorities, institutions, teachers, and communities. By investing in resources, training, and inclusive policies, Uzbekistan can empower its EFL educators to harness digital tools effectively, ultimately improving language education outcomes and preparing learners for a digitally connected world.

The post-pandemic era has underscored the vital importance of digital literacy in EFL teaching in Uzbekistan. Despite the increased reliance on digital tools, many

Uzbek EFL teachers face significant challenges including inadequate technological infrastructure, limited digital skills, low student engagement in online settings, and difficulties adapting traditional curricula to digital formats. Socio-economic disparities and cultural resistance further complicate these issues. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive investment in technology, continuous professional development for teachers, development of accessible digital learning materials, and supportive policies to bridge the digital divide. Through collaborative efforts, Uzbek educators can successfully integrate digital literacy into language learning, enhancing educational quality and better preparing students for the demands of the modern world.

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